NEW

HISTORY OF
RUSSIA

Discover a nation shaped by war, revolution and resilience

MEET THE VIKINGS WHO FOUNDED THE MOTHERLAND

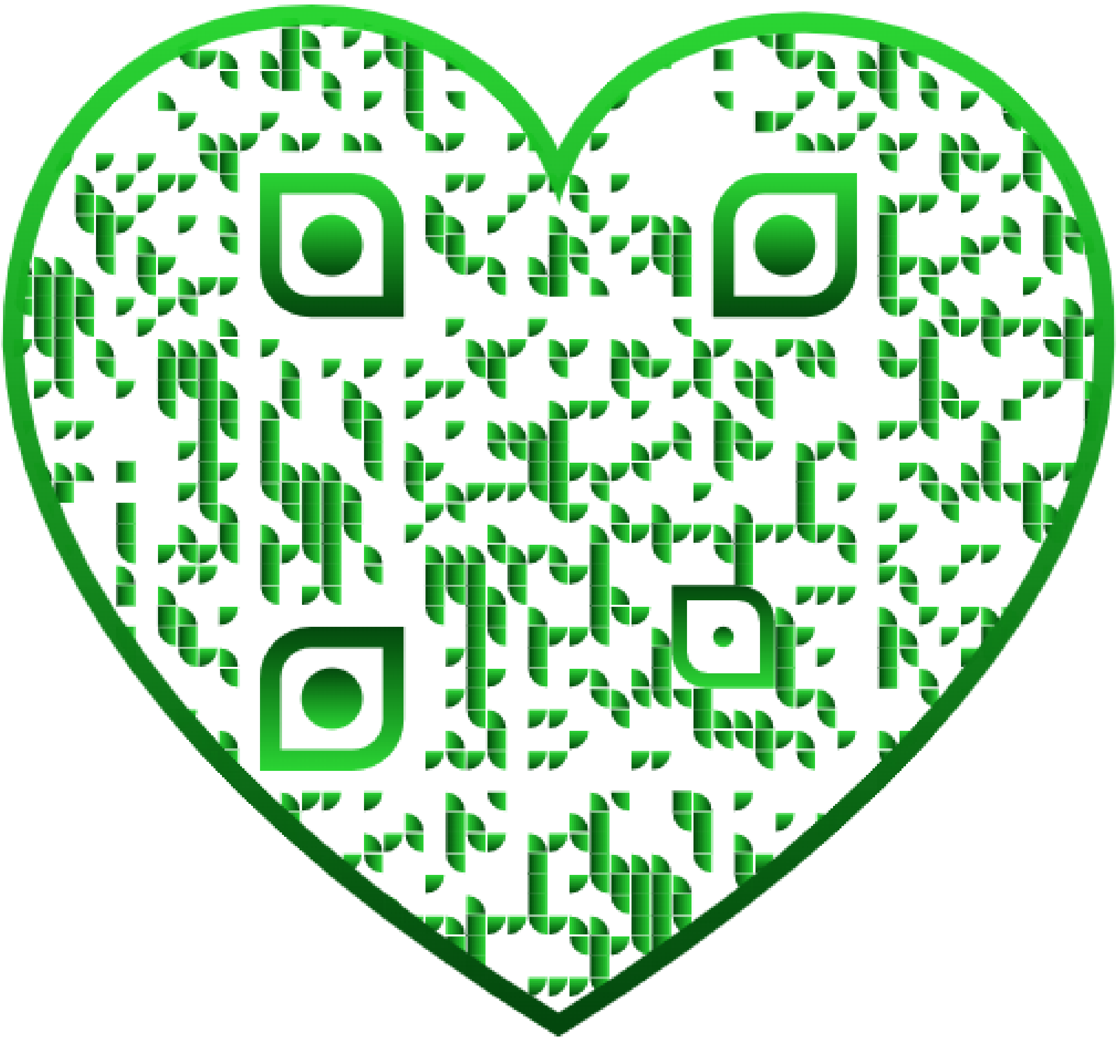
FROM THE MAKERS OF ALL ABOUT HISTORY

Digital Edition

FUTURE

SECOND EDITION

IVAN THE GREAT ★ THE RUSSIAN CHURCH ★ RACE FOR THE STARS



Welcome

Russia is a place unlike any other. A vast, sweeping land of rolling hills, precipitous mountains, and wind-blasted tundras. Its borders stretch from the Bering Strait that narrowly separates it from Alaska to the shores of the Black Sea on the edge of Europe, encompassing 11 time zones and bestriding all of northern Asia. Its history reaches all the way back to the 800s and the founding of the Kievan Rus' by intrepid Vikings. Since then it has been transformed by the reigns of both ruthless and pioneering leaders and repeatedly forced to fight for its very survival in the face of seemingly unstoppable foes. From its literature to its unique style of orthodox faith, towering architecture, and collectivist outlook, Mother Russia is a fascinating country home to an equally intriguing patchwork of peoples. A major player on the global stage both politically and culturally, it has gifted the world some of its greatest philosophers, composers, and writers. And yet to many living outside of the largest country on Earth it remains an enigma. Turn the page to begin unravelling its incredible story...

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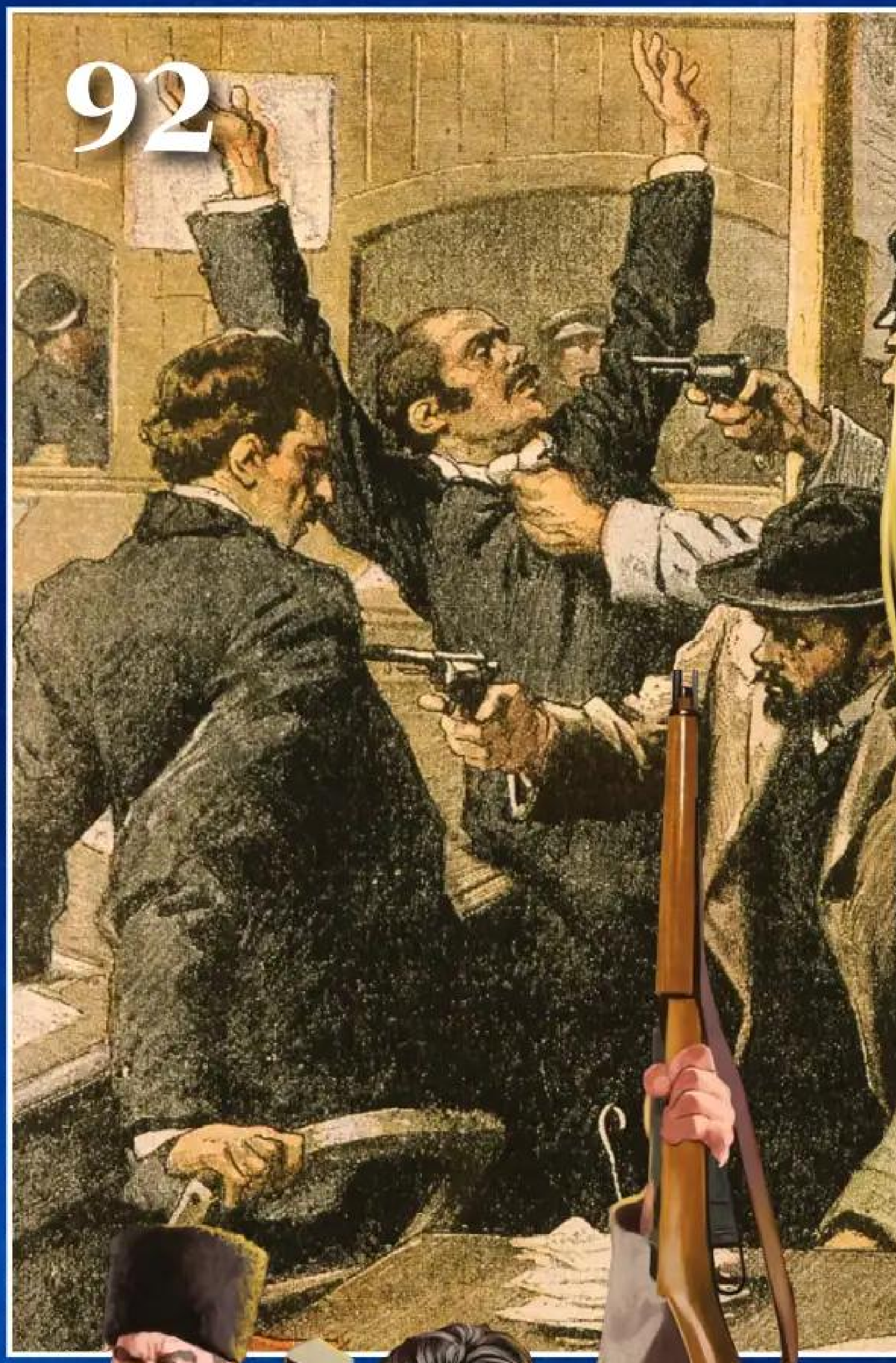
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The Kievan Rus' was ruled by the Rurik dynasty

Kievan Rus'

Making the Motherland

IN A TALE WORTHY OF ONE OF THE GREAT SAGAS, A BAND OF ELITE NORTHERN WARRIORS ON THEIR WAY TO THE CITY OF DREAMS FOUND THEMSELVES IN A GOLDEN LAND OF PLENTY...

Written by April Madden

Alamy

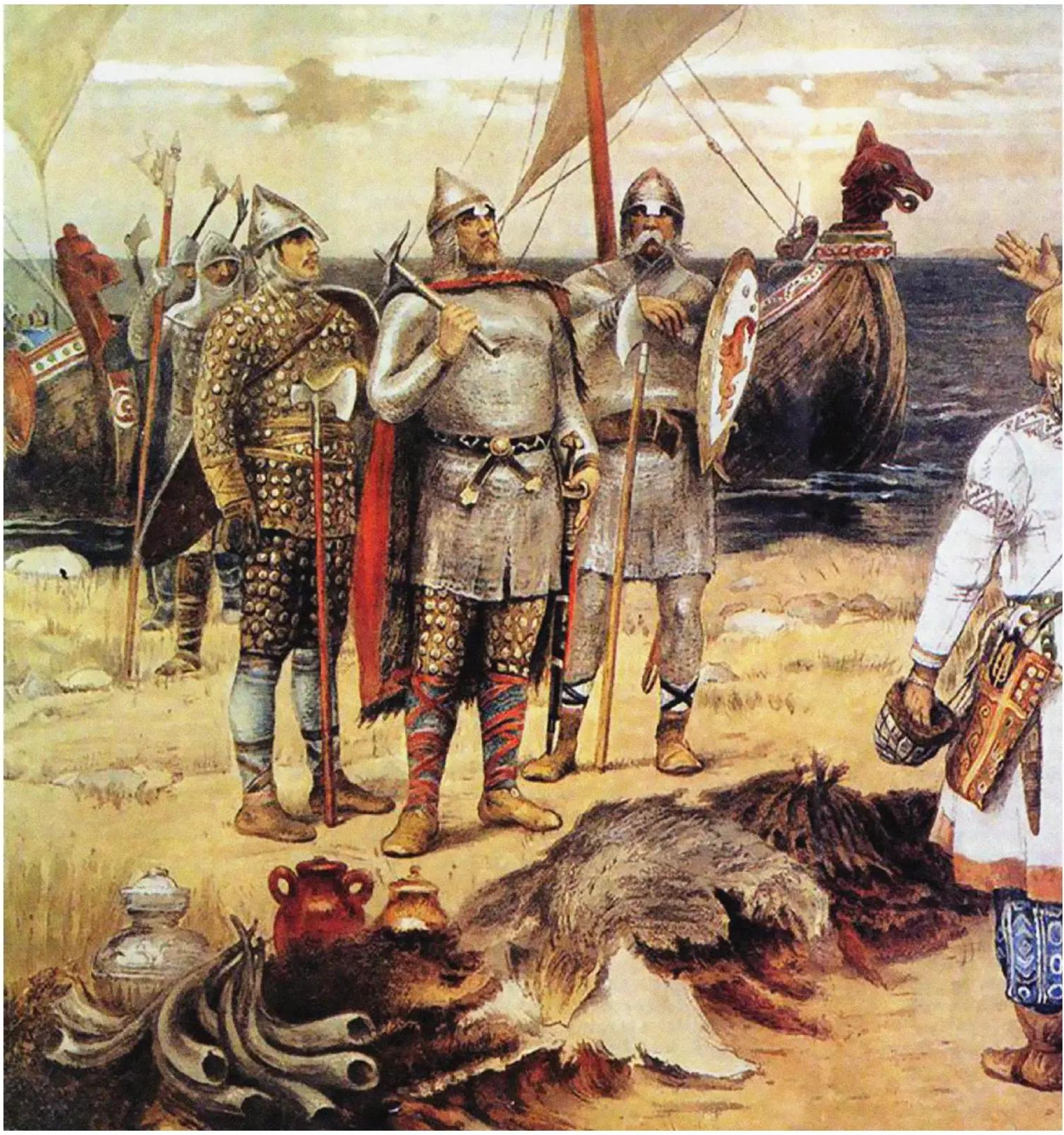
The dragon-prowed ship nosed its way downriver. The sound of the slow steady beat called by the chanter for the oars to follow mingled with the lazy gurgle of the water and the drone of bees in the wildflowers on the banks. It was drowsy and hot, the summer waning slowly into gold, but already the scent of the sun-bright air carried a later promise of snow - deep snow like a fall of white winter jewels. It was a good land, a land for barley and cattle, for beehives and white horses and mead halls, for summers of plenty and for tales and song on long winter nights. It wasn't the new river route to Miklagard the captain was hoping for – they were yet too far north for that – but this place in the eastern wilderness called Garðaríki was perhaps almost as important. Fat with game, green with sun and rain, the forested air whispering of winter's dreaming, it was a paradise fit for a hearth fire tale. It was true that the land had inhabitants already, but they were a little unlettered people, hut-dwellers, wanderers and forest-burners; they could not stand against warriors for long. Strong, though; they would fetch good silver in the slave markets of Serkland. He and his crew could easily take land here, fortify a little river-port to use as a staging post for further expeditions, live off the fat of the good earth. A new route to Miklagard could wait just a little longer.

Sometime in the 8th century, Scandinavian Vikings began pushing further south and east than the northern European shores they had previously been raiding. The abbeys, monasteries and coastal towns that they'd looted and put to the torch were all very well, but they needed somewhere to sell their booty – and to buy exotic goods with the proceeds. The Vikings were not just raiders but traders, and they had expensive tastes: they wanted wine, silk, spices, gemstones, perfumes, the exotic camphor oil that they used to treat colds and acne. They found them in the great city they called Miklagard, known today as Istanbul.

In the 8th century, Istanbul, then named Constantinople (and before that Byzantium), was the last vestige of the Roman Empire, and it was fabulously wealthy. Situated at the crux between Europe and Asia, it was the beating heart of the trade routes of the Silk Road. The Vikings found their way there from the Baltic Sea, negotiating the mighty rivers the Volga and the Dnieper before entering either the Black Sea or the Caspian Sea and picking their way westwards again via smaller rivers such as the Don, Kura, Aras and Oka (from the Caspian shores they also found their way to the glittering city of Baghdad, which they called Serkland). The route was not without problems, however. In places, the lesser rivers were shallow or tumbled over falls, and the Viking sailors had to carry or drag their ships overland until they could be launched again. This limited the size of the vessels they could use and the amount of goods they could put in them, which was a big problem. The Vikings were making huge profits in Constantinople. Not only did its citizens find their furs, feathers, walrus ivory and deft metalwork to be attractive trade goods that Viking merchants could price keenly, but the imperial family, paranoid as only the last of Rome could be, were prepared to pay vastly inflated prices to buy the loyalty of the terrifying Viking warriors as an elite personal guard. Viking traders and fighters alike left Miklagard laden with well-gotten gains: gold and silver, jewels, velvets and silks in a rainbow of colours, fragrant oils, exotic spices, and huge amounts of cash.

Transport, though, was a problem, and the Vikings were nothing if not problem-solvers. Wary of the sea route to Constantinople around Spain and through the Mediterranean – storms and well-armed garrisons had beset the few unlucky raiding parties that had ever sailed that way – and dismissive of the overland route through Europe, they set about exploring the surroundings of the rivers that had first borne them to Miklagard. Soon the lands of the Volga basin were filled with prospectors looking for a more viable route to Constantinople. They called this land Garðaríki, a complex term that could mean 'farmland', 'fortified land', or 'land of towns'. For the Vikings that explored and eventually settled there, it would become all of those things.

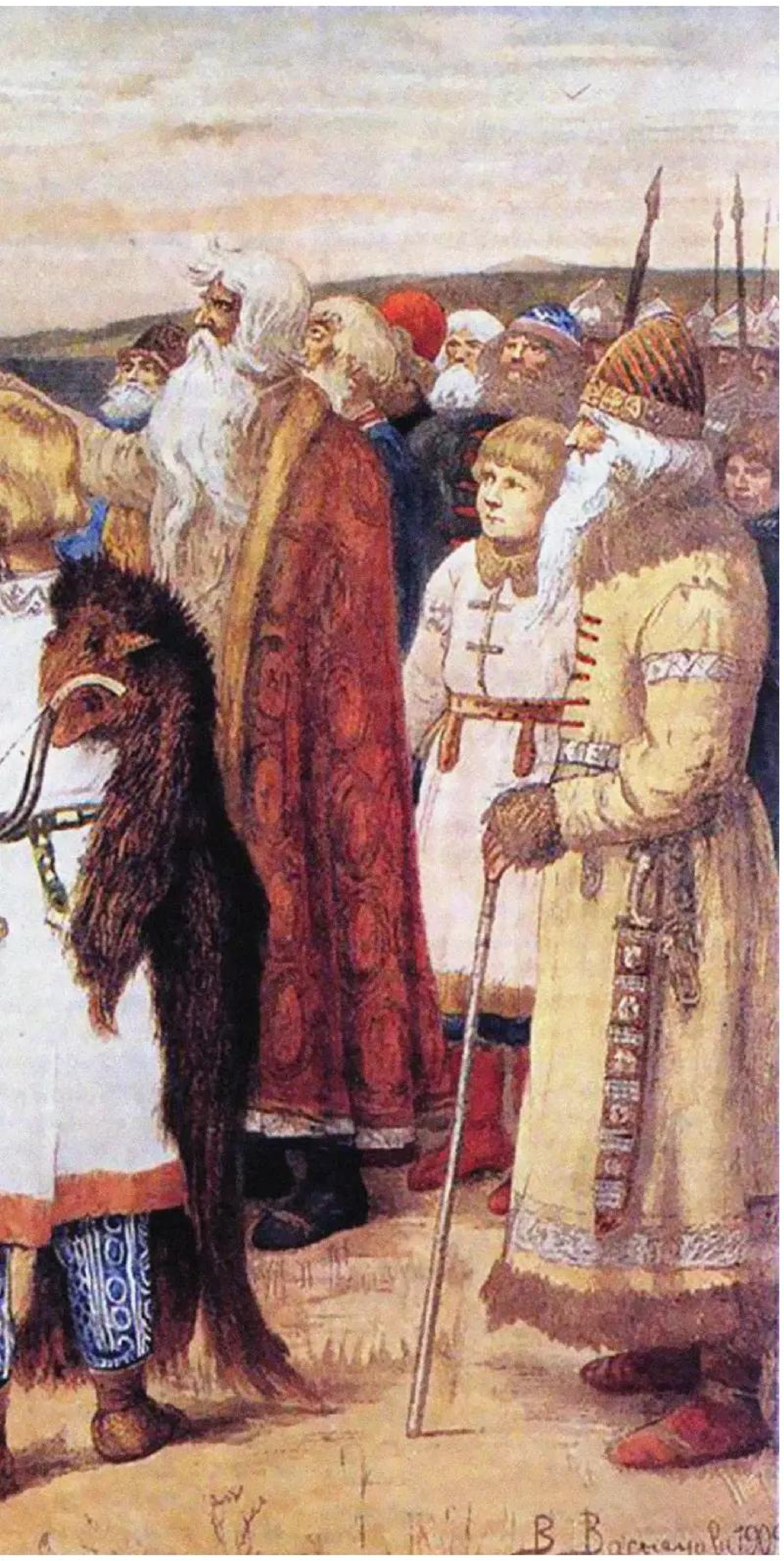
The Volga basin explorations were dominated by a group known as Varangians – those who had served in the elite guard of the emperor of Constantinople. These were no landless freebooters; the Varangian Guard was reserved for high-status individuals. It held the possibility of battle against new and puissant foes (leading to honours before the gods in the afterlife), it meant travel to an impossibly exotic location, and the riches on offer were incredible. The Varangians numbered jarls and even kings in their ranks: Norwegian ruler and would-be king of England Harald Hardrada was



ABOVE Part of the Varangian Guard, Rurik would become the first prince of the Rus and the town he founded would become Novgorod

RIGHT Vladimir the Great was canonised as a saint by the Eastern Orthodox church for converting the Kievan Rus' to Christianity

OPPOSITE The Varangians were searching for better river routes to Constantinople when they decided to settle the lands of the Volga basin



"Rurik returned in 862, and from the remnants of Holmgard he built a new town – literally"

a Varangian, and so too was a certain Swedish chieftain named Rurik.

By the time Rurik was venturing into Garðaríki, bands of Varangians had been exploring it for decades, with limited success. Runestones in Scandinavia and even in Ukraine record the deaths of Vikings in the perilous lands of the east. Rurik, too, had problems with the native Slavs; in around 860 they rebelled against his little settlement of Holmgard on the Volkhov River and drove the Viking colonists out. By 862, the local tribes had fallen into warfare between themselves. According to the medieval book *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, the only solution they could see to this problem was to invite the Varangian lord back – to rule.

Rurik returned in 862, and from the remnants of Holmgard he built a new town – literally. Novgorod ('New City') is among Russia's oldest, and it dates back to the little Varangian township that became Rurik's base. He gave his name to the first dynasty of Russia's tsars, the Rurikids, who ruled in a wiggling but unbroken line for over 700 years – and Russia's next (and last) ruling house, the Romanovs, were their descendants.

Rurik and his Viking cohort were what the local folk referred to as Rus'. A couple of potential translations of the term have been suggested: that it describes their possible origins in Roslagen, Sweden (more broadly, the old Finnish word for Swedish was Ruotsi); or – perhaps the likeliest – that it meant 'men who row' and came from overhearing the Varangian boatmen referring to each other in Old Norse as *rods* (rower). It soon came to mean not just the Varangians but the lands they controlled too.

Rurik was succeeded by his kinsman Oleg the Good, regent for Rurik's young son, Igor. Oleg's relationship to Rurik is a matter of debate – he was not his brother – but he was certainly no usurper; Igor succeeded him just as he was supposed to. But Oleg bequeathed the Rurikid prince a much bigger territory than simply Novgorod. He had been a Varangian commander and he was a war hawk; in the 880s he began to expand Rus' territory, seizing first Smolensk and then Lyubech before mobilising his troops against a much bigger prize: Kiev (modern-day Kyiv). According to legend, he hid his warriors in their boats before approaching the city with the child Igor in his arms, claiming to be a simple, desperate messenger from the Rus' court lost on his way to Constantinople and begging for the aid of Kiev's rulers. When they opened the gates to him the Rus' warriors revealed themselves and took the city from which they would derive the other half of their name: the Kievan Rus'.

Oleg even took on Constantinople itself, not with any real hope of seizing the city but with the aim of brokering a much better trade

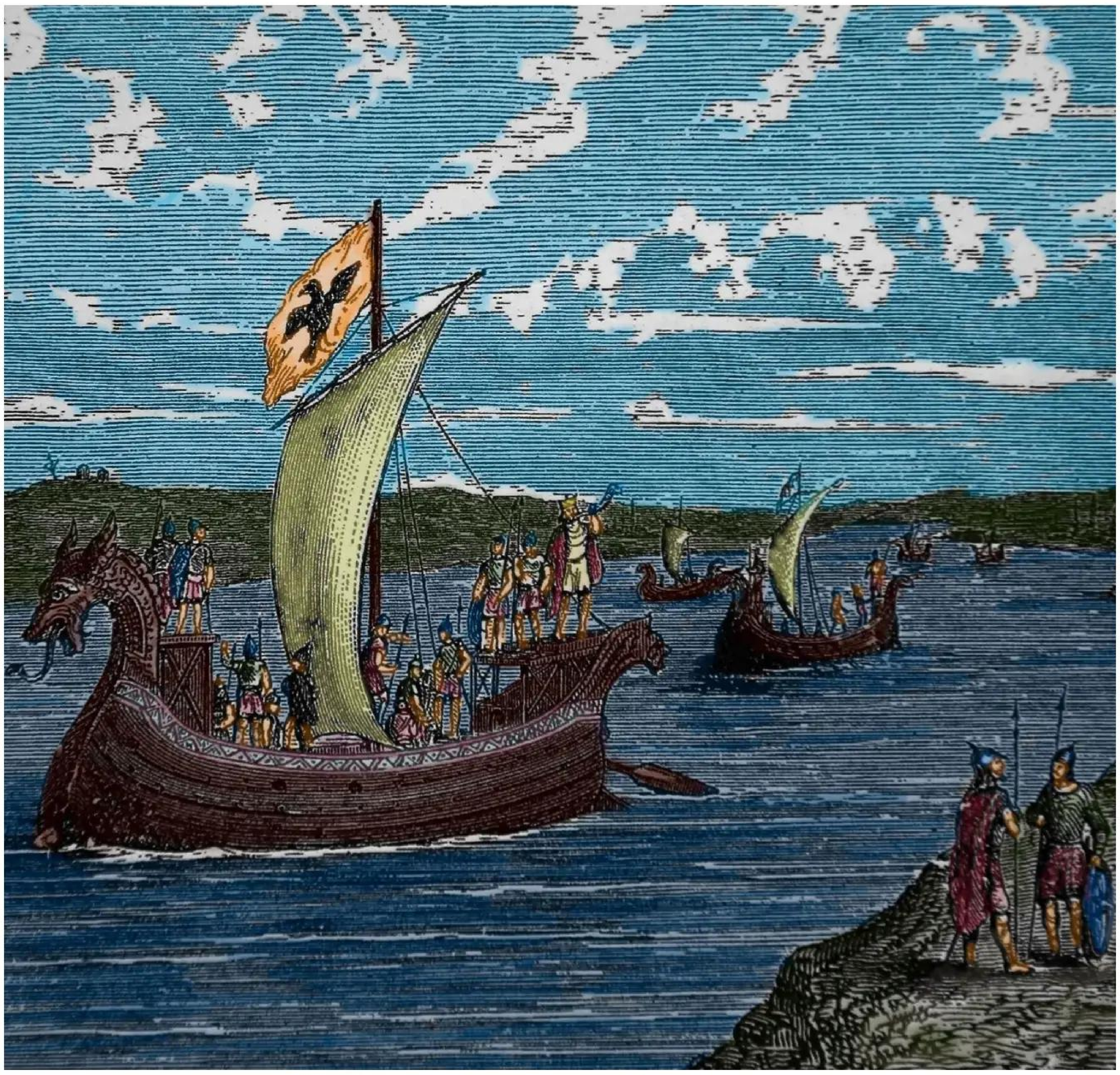
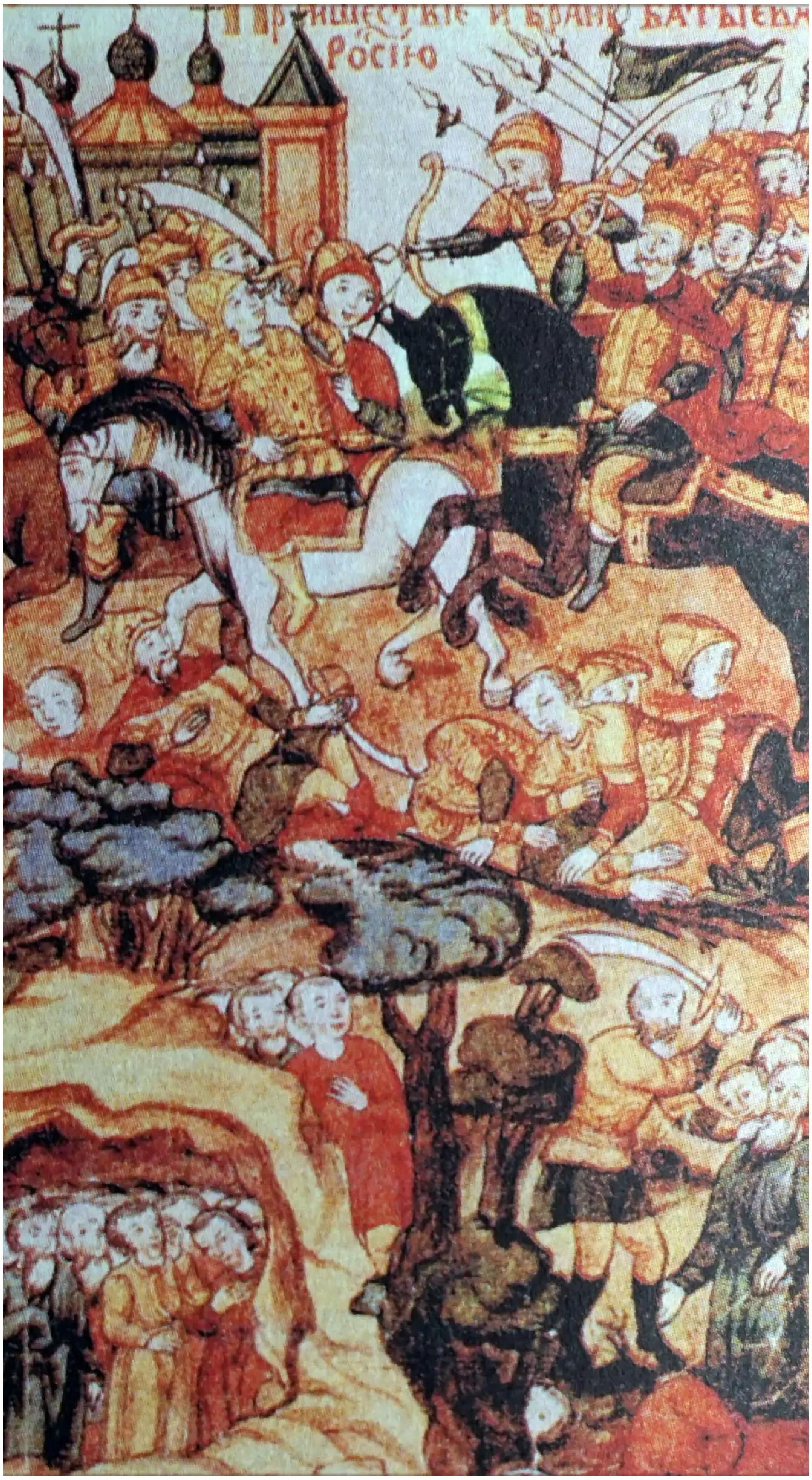


Image source: Getty Images, Alamy



> *"Vladimir became reflective and began to explore Judaism, Islam, and Roman Catholicism"*

deal in the peacemaking that followed. By the time of Vladimir the Great nearly a century later, relations had improved considerably. Vladimir was the illegitimate child of Igor's son, Sviatoslav, and his mistress, a maidservant who was reputedly a witch and a seer (Vladimir too was a staunch Norse pagan). Originally simply prince of Novgorod, he had fought for overall rule against his legitimate older brother Yaropolk, taking Kiev in 978 and putting his brother to the sword. At this point, Vladimir became reflective and began to explore Judaism, Islam, and Roman Catholicism, his grandmother Olga's faith. Missionaries visited the new grand prince of Kiev and attempted to convert him, but he resisted all of Christianity's blandishments except one: a marital alliance with the imperial family of Constantinople.

Anna Porphyrogenita was the emperor's sister, a princess "born to the purple" — that is, of the highest rank, and expected to become a queen. She did, of Kievan Rus', and she brought her faith with her. Anna is the reason that Russian Christians today still predominantly follow Eastern Orthodox Christianity, the faith of Constantinople. As part of his marriage negotiations, Vladimir converted both himself and his entire realm to Christianity. For this wholesale Christianisation of the Kievan Rus' the Eastern Orthodox church canonised him as a saint, and a cathedral dedicated to him stands in Kyiv today.

There had been other women in Vladimir's life before Anna Porphyrogenita, and one of them was Rogneda (or Ragnhild), a Norse princess whose father had established himself at Polotsk. Vladimir had proposed a marital alliance with the family when he was still prince of Novgorod, but Rogneda had refused, saying that she wouldn't marry the son of a servant. Vladimir killed her family, claimed their territory, and took Rogneda by force. She bore him a son, Yaroslav, who became the bane of Vladimir's later years. Gifted the princedom of Novgorod like his father before him, Yaroslav

LEFT Kievan Rus' was toppled by the wider Mongol invasion of Europe in the 13th century

The landscape that would have beguiled early Viking travellers to settle in the lands they passed through on their way to Constantinople

rebelled and stopped paying the city's tribute to his father in 1014. Vladimir died a year later.

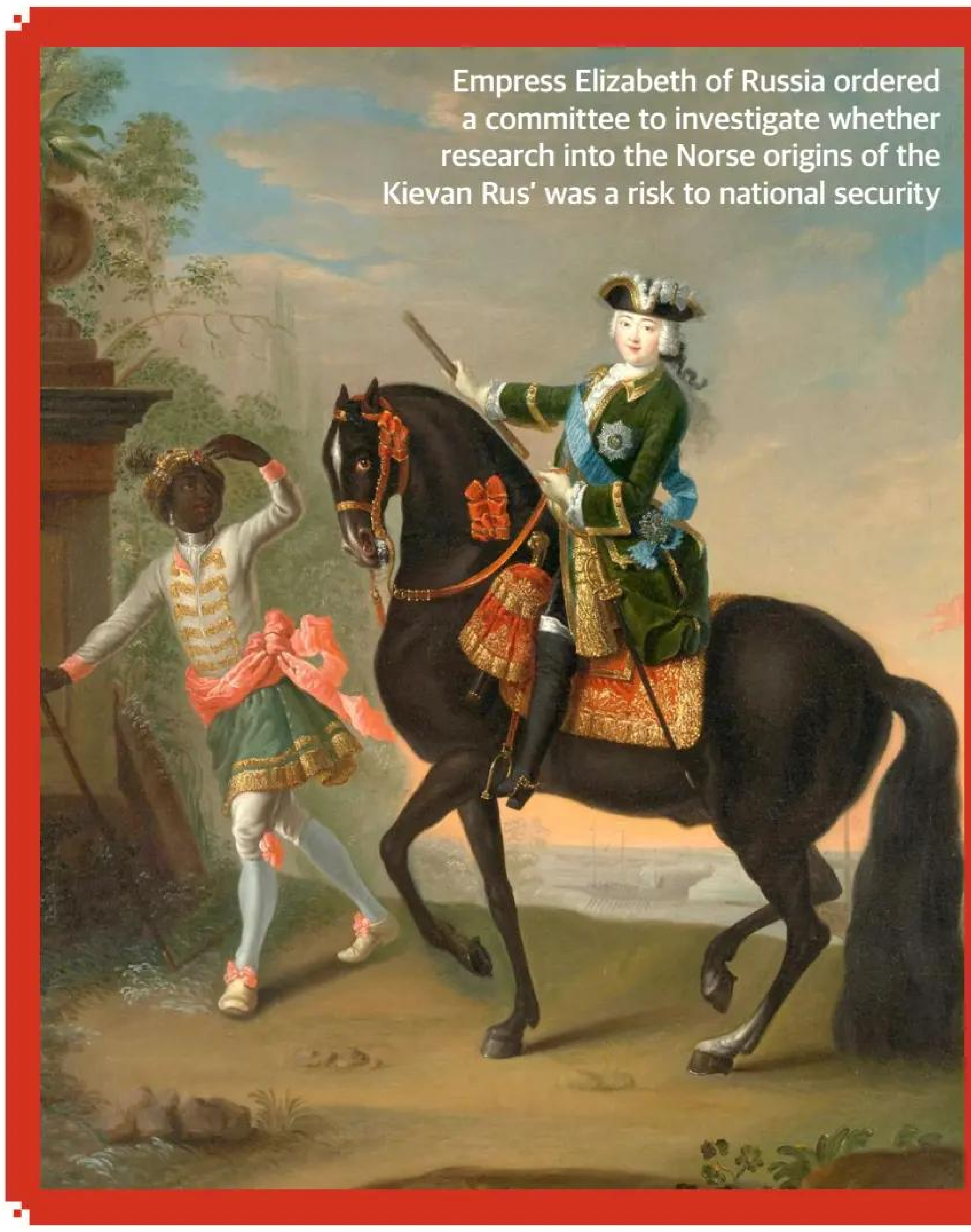
Yaroslav, known to posterity as 'the Wise', then repeated history by contesting with his brother Sviatopolk for the Kievan throne. Sviatopolk, apparently Vladimir's eldest son (by his late brother's wife, who was a captured Greek nun), had been imprisoned as a traitor and potential regicide but was freed after his father's death, when he promptly went on to murder three of his brothers in his bid for power. Yaroslav defeated him and, perhaps plagued by the same fratricidal guilt that had tormented his father, settled down to a life of peace both within and outside his borders. Ruling a wealthy realm that was enjoying a golden age and wedded to a Swedish princess, the four eldest of their children went on to marry into the royal families of England, France, Hungary and Norway, while the couple's three youngest sons succeeded to the Kievan throne one after another. Their descendants would head up the princedoms of the Rus' city-states that owed fealty to Kiev.

Peace would not drift through the riverlands of the Kievan Rus' for long. A new force was coming, one that would shock and terrify Europe and Asia just as much as the Norse had done centuries before.

The Mongols screamed through the valleys and across the steppes like wildfire. After years of Mongol raids on their Cuman neighbours, the Rus' princes finally bestirred themselves from behind the walls of their city-states under the leadership of the prince of Novgorod, Mstislav the Bold, in 1223 to take on this new enemy on the banks of the Dnieper. They were largely unsuccessful.

Mstislav the Bold survived, but the grand prince of Kiev, Mstislav III, was slain by the Mongol forces after surrendering. Surprisingly, the Mongol force then packed up and went back to Asia and the court of the great Genghis Khan. They had gathered the intelligence they needed. In 1237, they were back under the auspices of Batu Khan, grandson of Genghis and creator of the formidable Golden Horde. He took Kiev in 1240.

The glory days of the Kievan Rus' were at an end, and the Russian client princes who scrabbled in its ruins thereafter would be forced to pay tribute to the might of Mongolia for two hundred years to come.


Empress Elizabeth of Russia ordered a committee to investigate whether research into the Norse origins of the Kievan Rus' was a risk to national security

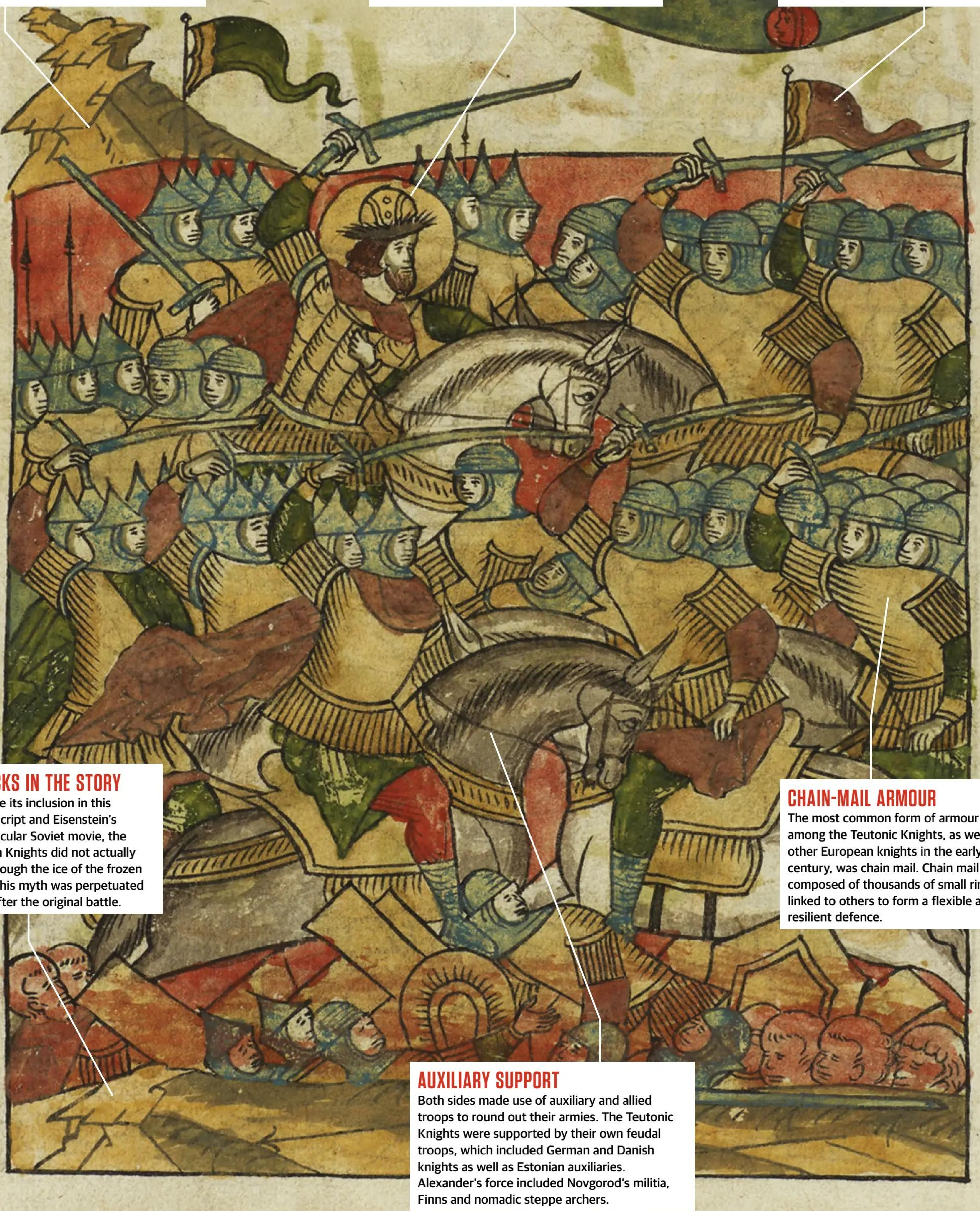
The anti-Normanist view

Historians today largely agree on the Norse origins of the Kievan Rus', but that wasn't always so. In the 18th century, German historian Gerhardt Friedrich Müller was the first scholar since the writers of the ancient chronicles to explicitly suggest a Scandinavian heritage for the Rus', originally in a lecture to the Russian Academy of Sciences that was later published as *Origines gentis et nominis Russorum* ('The Origins of the People and the Name of the Russians'). Müller had to publish because he wasn't allowed to finish his speech: he was shouted down, and Empress Elizabeth even convened a committee to report on whether his research was harmful to the Russian state. Opinions changed in the 19th century in the face of research into the overwhelming evidence for the Viking origins of the Rus', but the 20th century presented its own challenges.

During the Russian Revolution, the Romanov's Rurikid ancestors, their fascination with decadent Constantinople, and the Germanic descent they had in common with the hated Tsarina Alexandra Feodorovna exemplified everything that was rotten about the royal family to their enemies. Later, during World War II, the story would be hijacked to play into odious Nazi stereotypes about the assumed superiority of the Germanic race and their so-called natural aptitude for governance, over the Slavs in particular, a view most right-thinking Russians wanted to reject.

After the fall of the USSR, former Soviet states such as Ukraine embraced what is known as the 'anti-Normanist view' (Norman here in its original meaning of 'northmen' and not limited to the Norse that colonised the area of France that bears their name) as a point of national pride to distance themselves from their former Russian masters. And it's nationalistic, inward-looking pride that fuels the anti-Normanist view in Russia today, where it is even promulgated in some school textbooks.

Image source: Getty Images, Alamy



NATIONAL LEGEND

This depiction of the Battle on the Ice was from the illuminated manuscript *Life of Alexander Nevsky* produced during Ivan the Terrible's reign over 300 years later. The battle was also revived for Sergei Eisenstein's 1938 epic, *Alexander Nevsky*, which tried to paint the medieval prince as a Marxist hero.

HOLY WARRIOR

Prince Alexander Yaroslavich Nevsky leads the charge against the Northern Crusaders. Alexander is remembered as a great military leader, having already defeated Swedish crusaders at the 1240 Battle of the Neva River, which earned him the honorific 'Nevsky' for his victory. The prince is depicted with a halo as he was venerated as an Orthodox saint in 1547.

CRUSADER KNIGHTS

The core of the Crusader army was made up of the Livonian Order of the Teutonic Knights. The Knights accepted only German noblemen into their ranks and they lived much like monks when not in battle. At Lake Peipus there were just 100 Knights out of an army of some 2,600.

CRACKS IN THE STORY

Despite its inclusion in this manuscript and Eisenstein's spectacular Soviet movie, the beaten Knights did not actually fall through the ice of the frozen lake. This myth was perpetuated long after the original battle.

CHAIN-MAIL ARMOUR

The most common form of armour among the Teutonic Knights, as well as other European knights in the early 13th century, was chain mail. Chain mail was composed of thousands of small rings linked to others to form a flexible and resilient defence.

AUXILIARY SUPPORT

Both sides made use of auxiliary and allied troops to round out their armies. The Teutonic Knights were supported by their own feudal troops, which included German and Danish knights as well as Estonian auxiliaries. Alexander's force included Novgorod's militia, Finns and nomadic steppe archers.

Battle on the Ice

LAKE PEIPUS, RUSSIA, 5 APRIL 1242

Written by Marc DeSantis

Novgorod, a wealthy trading city of northern Russia, was set in the midst of an incredibly hostile world. To the east lay the vast Mongol Empire, which had arisen suddenly in the Far East and swept westward, crushing all opposition before it. The hard-riding Mongols had only recently smashed a Russian army at the Battle of the Kalka River in 1223 and had forced much of Russia under the yoke of a harsh tributary system.

To the north were hostile Swedes, and to the west, along the shores of the Baltic Sea, were the expanding territories of the Catholic German order of the Teutonic Knights. The Knights had originally been established in Acre, Palestine, in the late 12th century to crusade against Muslim forces in the Holy Land, but with the passage of time they had switched their focus to northeastern Europe. Under the overall direction of a *hochmeister* (high master), the zealous Teutonic Order ruthlessly battled the pagan Prussians and Lithuanians of the Baltic region as well as the Christian - but Orthodox - Russians.

Though never numerous, the Teutonic Knights - who were all drawn from the German aristocracy - were superb armoured cavalrymen and demonstrated a discipline on the battlefield unsurpassed elsewhere in contemporary Europe. Clad very simply in a white surcoat blazoned with a single cross of jet black and worn over armour, the Teutonic Knight was just as much a monk as a soldier, being celibate and adhering to a strict, monastic way of life. Personal possessions were few, even when counting weapons.

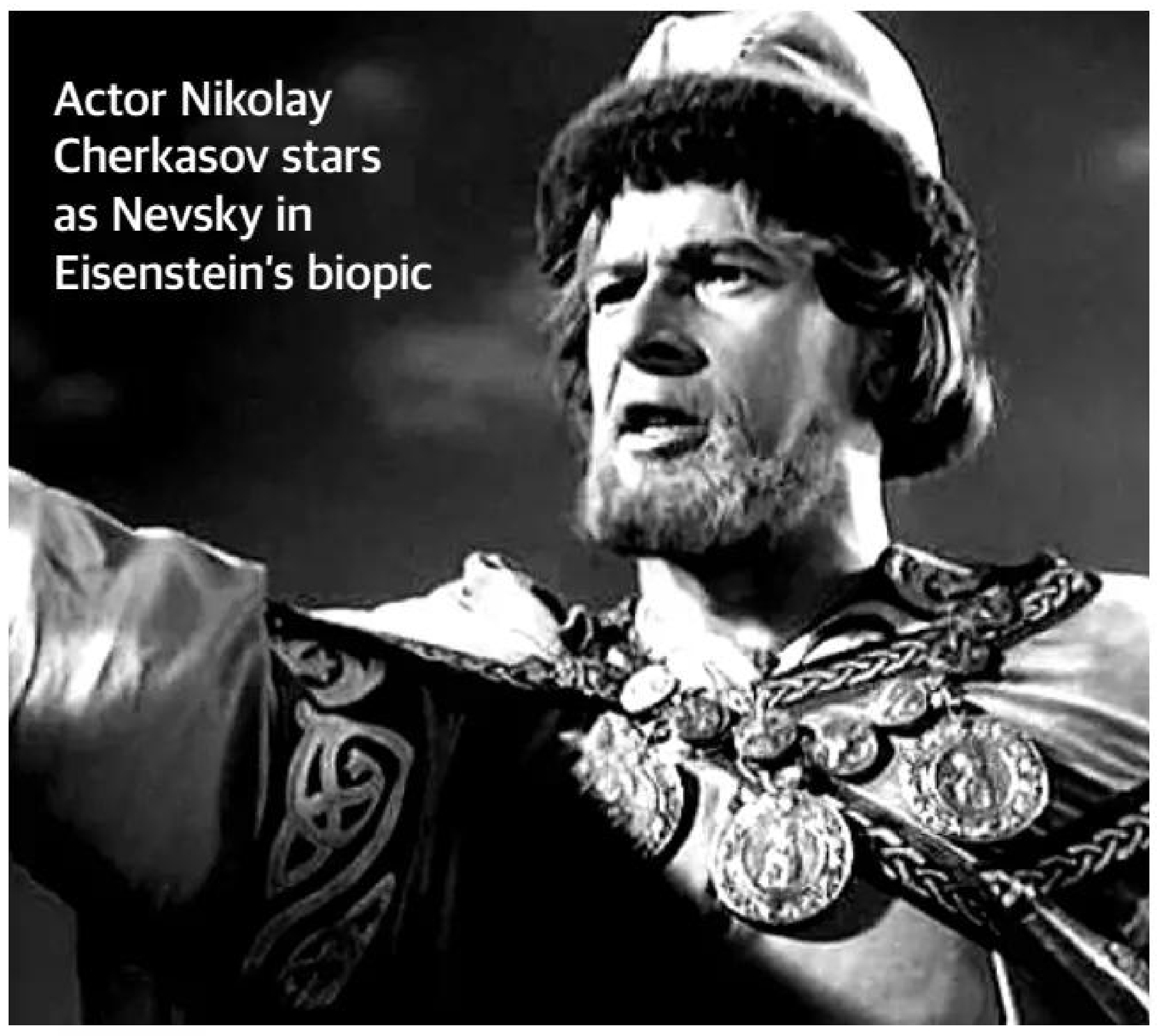
However, while the individuals may have lived frugally, the Teutonic Order itself was very wealthy. It had substantial endowments in many parts of Europe to fund its military activities. Also, whenever the Knights conquered Baltic lands, German colonists were quick to follow. These settlers were taxed, further enriching the Order.

After Mongols began attacking Kievan Russian principalities in 1237, the Knights took the opportunity to grab more lands in beleaguered northern Russia. In early 1241, with papal approval, the Teutonic Knights of Livonia, an independent branch of the Order, together with other German knights and vassal knights of the king of Denmark, mounted a crusade against Novgorod. Prince Alexander Yaroslavich Nevsky, then just 20 years old and living in exile, was recalled by the people of Novgorod to fend them off.

The prince was an excellent soldier and had been given the honorific of 'Nevsky' for a victory he had won over the Swedes at the Neva River in 1240. He had nonetheless been driven out soon afterward by Novgorodians unhappy with his rule. Seeing the Teutonic Knights attack as an opportunity to restore his own power, his first act on returning to Novgorod was to hang his political opponents. He then set out to completely scour his land of the German invaders, with the help of his elite druzhina bodyguards.

Despite the Crusaders' martial prowess, Nevsky racked up victories. Suitably affronted, the Knights amassed a large force to defeat the prince once and for all. On 5 April 1242, the Teutonic Knights of Livonia, together with other German knights, their Estonian auxiliary troops and some allied Danish knights, totalling around 2,600 men, caught up with Prince Alexander's 5,000-strong Russian army at Lake Peipus, which had frozen for the season. The Knights attacked the Novgorodian army, thundering across the ice. While it must have made an epic sight, their decision to do so was not as rash as it might sound; the Knights regularly used frozen rivers as roadways during wintertime campaigns.

But the heavily armoured Knights could not overcome the stout Russian defences and abandoned the field in defeat. The Novgorodian victory at Lake Peipus was significant in that it stopped the further progress eastward of the Teutonic Knights into Russia and helped establish the demarcation line in Europe between Western Christianity and the Orthodox East. Nevsky ruled Novgorod until his death in 1263, was declared an Orthodox saint in 1547 and remains a national hero.


Actor Nikolay Cherkasov stars as Nevsky in Eisenstein's biopic

Northern Crusaders

TROOPS 2,600
CAVALRY 900
INFANTRY 1,700

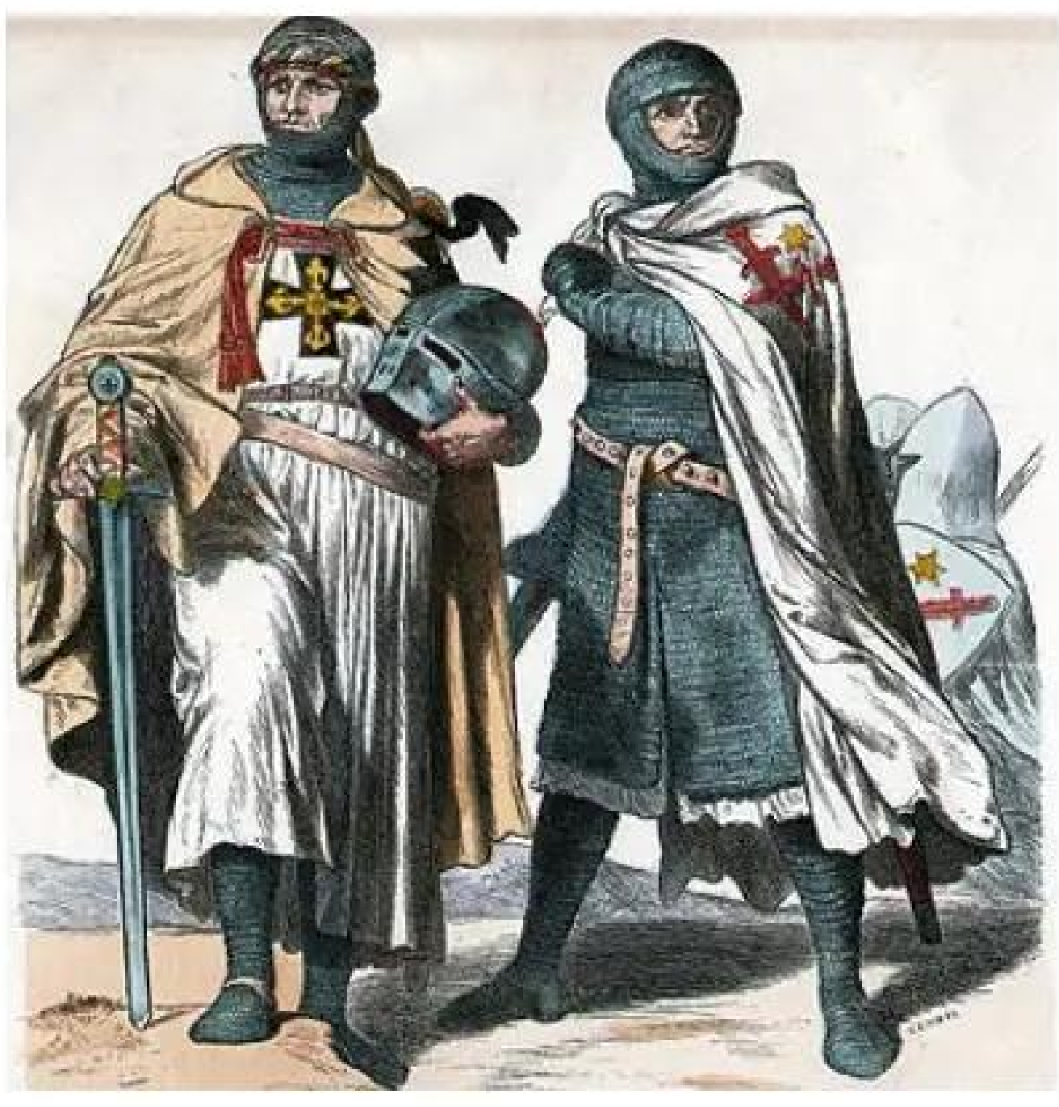
HERMANN VON BUXHÖVDEN

LEADER

Hermann came from a prominent family of German churchmen. After the disastrous Battle on the Ice, Hermann focused on state matters and founded an influential dynasty.

Strengths: He was a solid leader with real military skills.

Weaknesses: Hermann lacked sufficient troops with which to conduct the crusade.



TEUTONIC KNIGHTS OF LIVONIA

KEY UNIT

The Teutonic Knights of Livonia were an independent element of the larger Teutonic Knights order. The Knights lived like monks and were some of the best warriors of the Middle Ages.

Strengths: They were superb horsemen who displayed unexcelled discipline on the battlefield.

Weaknesses: The Teutonic Knights were few in number; only around 100 fought at Lake Peipus.

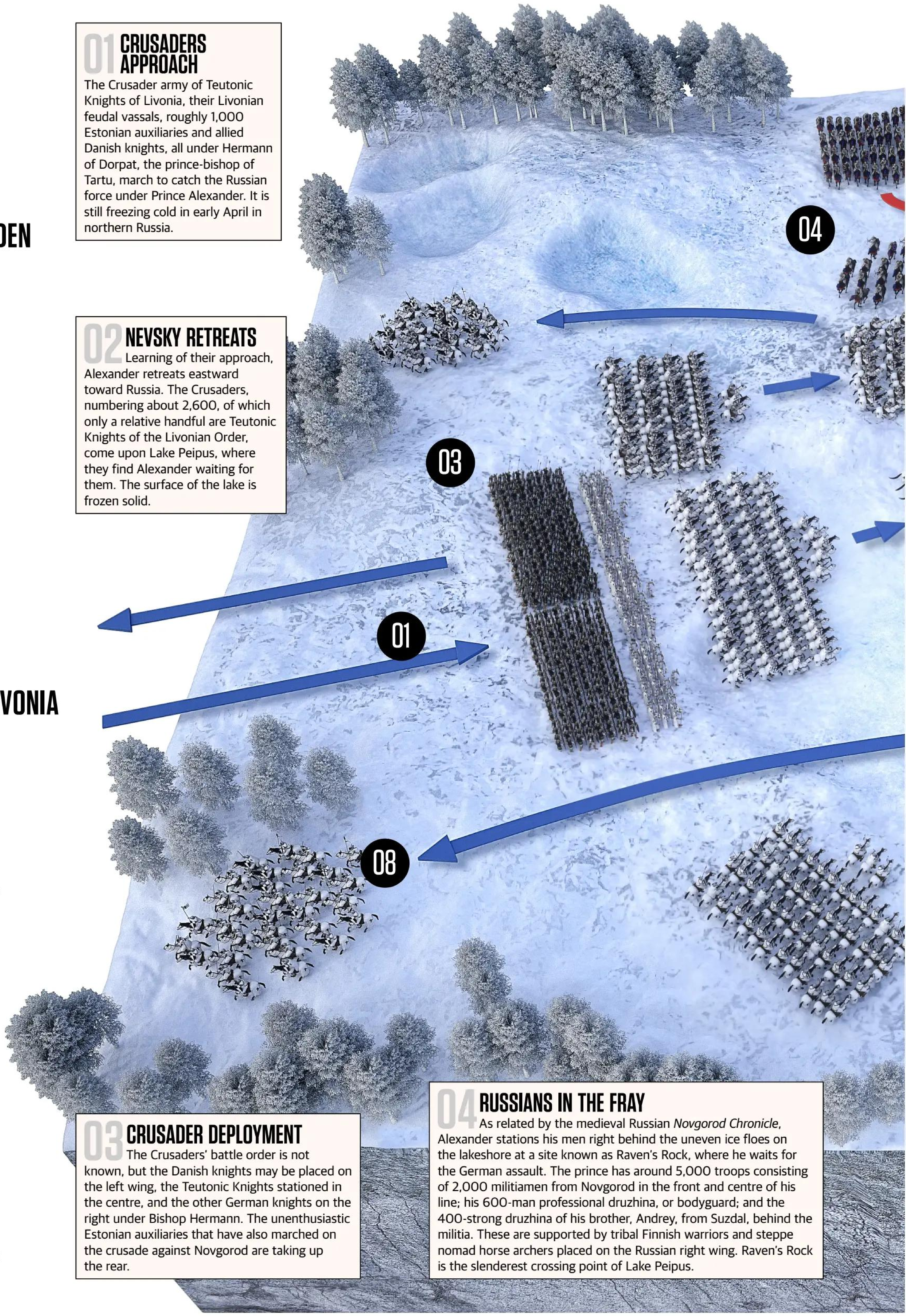
LANCE

KEY WEAPON

The lance was a long spear used by mounted warriors all over Europe. It was a deadly weapon that could penetrate even the toughest armour.

Strengths: It had a long reach and a powerful punch on the charge.

Weaknesses: Lances were unwieldy and little use once a charge had been delivered and hand-to-hand fighting ensued.



01 CRUSADERS APPROACH

The Crusader army of Teutonic Knights of Livonia, their Livonian feudal vassals, roughly 1,000 Estonian auxiliaries and allied Danish knights, all under Hermann of Dorpat, the prince-bishop of Tartu, march to catch the Russian force under Prince Alexander. It is still freezing cold in early April in northern Russia.

02 NEVSKY RETREATS

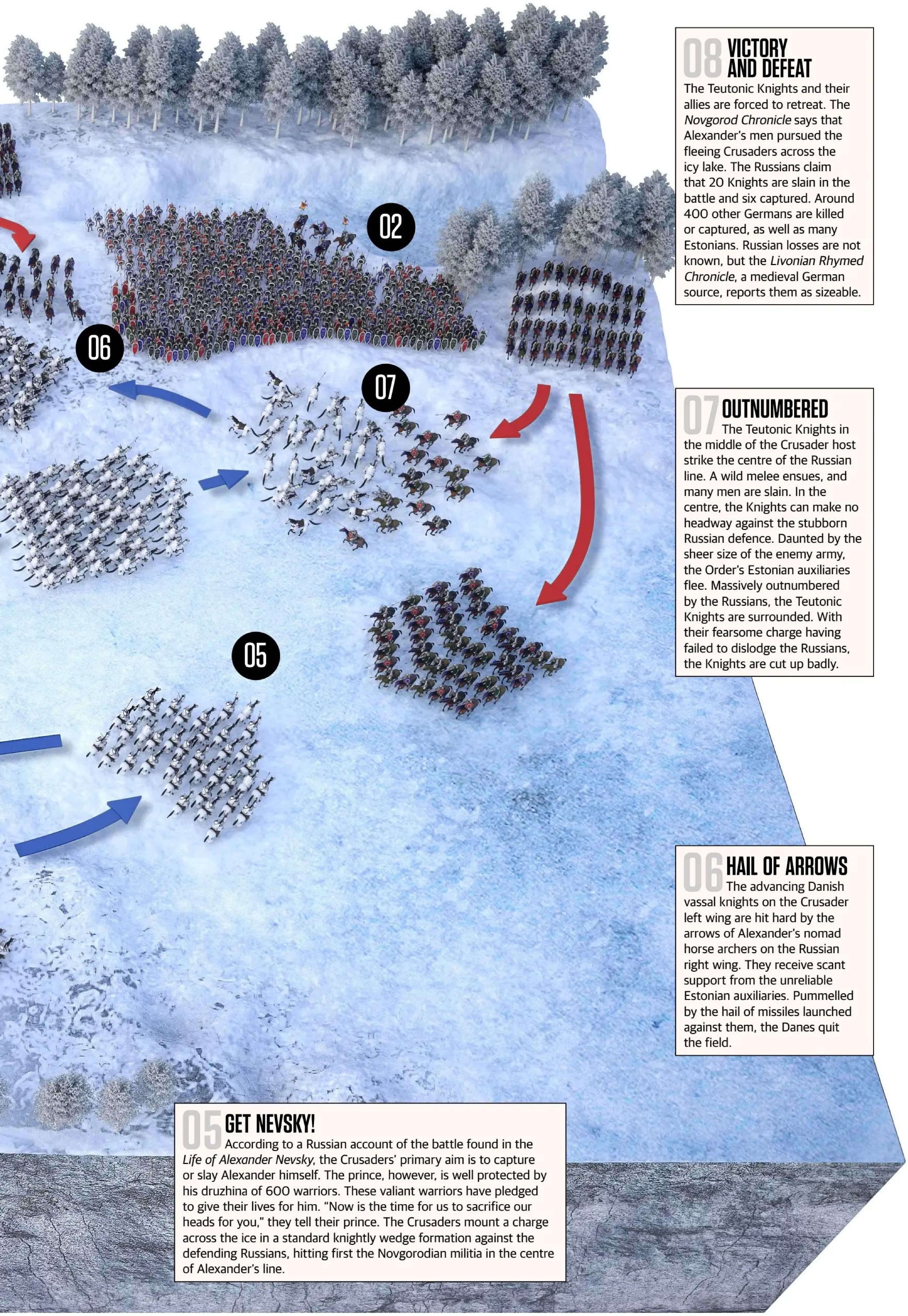
Learning of their approach, Alexander retreats eastward toward Russia. The Crusaders, numbering about 2,600, of which only a relative handful are Teutonic Knights of the Livonian Order, come upon Lake Peipus, where they find Alexander waiting for them. The surface of the lake is frozen solid.

03 CRUSADER DEPLOYMENT

The Crusaders' battle order is not known, but the Danish knights may be placed on the left wing, the Teutonic Knights stationed in the centre, and the other German knights on the right under Bishop Hermann. The unenthusiastic Estonian auxiliaries that have also marched on the crusade against Novgorod are taking up the rear.

04 RUSSIANS IN THE FRAY

As related by the medieval Russian *Novgorod Chronicle*, Alexander stations his men right behind the uneven ice floes on the lakeshore at a site known as Raven's Rock, where he waits for the German assault. The prince has around 5,000 troops consisting of 2,000 militiamen from Novgorod in the front and centre of his line; his 600-man professional druzhina, or bodyguard; and the 400-strong druzhina of his brother, Andrey, from Suzdal, behind the militia. These are supported by tribal Finnish warriors and steppe nomad horse archers placed on the Russian right wing. Raven's Rock is the slenderest crossing point of Lake Peipus.



08 VICTORY AND DEFEAT

The Teutonic Knights and their allies are forced to retreat. The *Novgorod Chronicle* says that Alexander's men pursued the fleeing Crusaders across the icy lake. The Russians claim that 20 Knights are slain in the battle and six captured. Around 400 other Germans are killed or captured, as well as many Estonians. Russian losses are not known, but the *Livonian Rhymed Chronicle*, a medieval German source, reports them as sizeable.

07 OUTNUMBERED

The Teutonic Knights in the middle of the Crusader host strike the centre of the Russian line. A wild melee ensues, and many men are slain. In the centre, the Knights can make no headway against the stubborn Russian defence. Daunted by the sheer size of the enemy army, the Order's Estonian auxiliaries flee. Massively outnumbered by the Russians, the Teutonic Knights are surrounded. With their fearsome charge having failed to dislodge the Russians, the Knights are cut up badly.

06 HAIL OF ARROWS

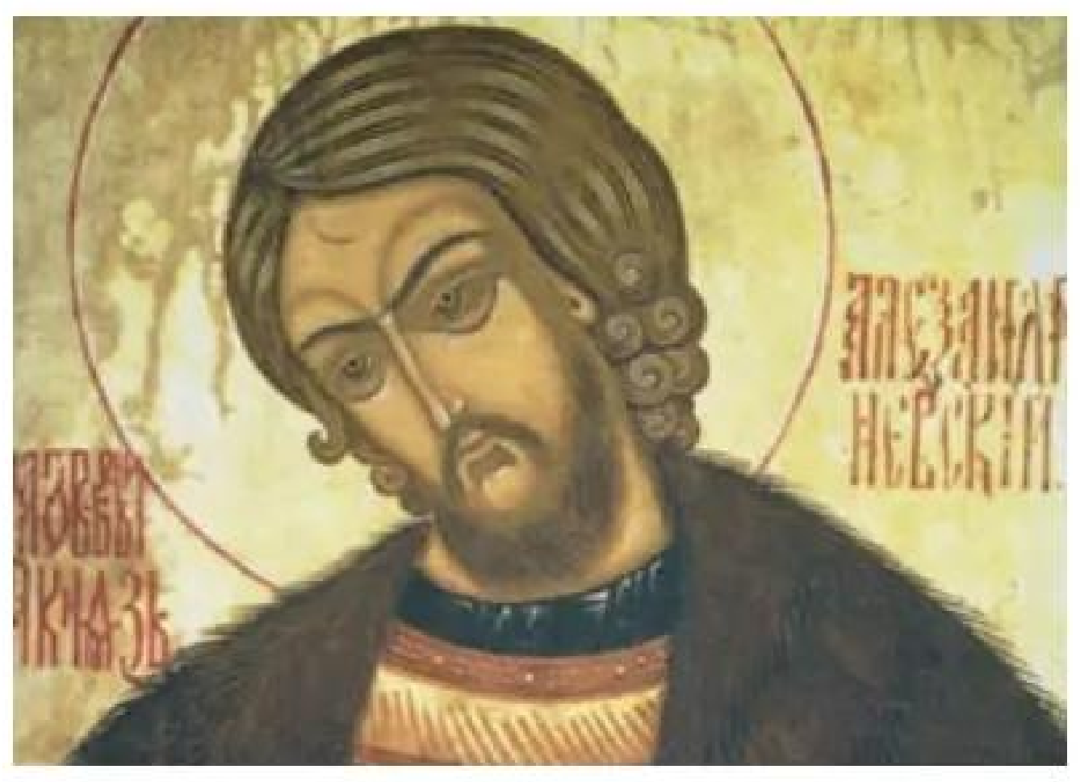
The advancing Danish vassal knights on the Crusader left wing are hit hard by the arrows of Alexander's nomad horse archers on the Russian right wing. They receive scant support from the unreliable Estonian auxiliaries. Pummelled by the hail of missiles launched against them, the Danes quit the field.

05 GET NEVSKY!

According to a Russian account of the battle found in the *Life of Alexander Nevsky*, the Crusaders' primary aim is to capture or slay Alexander himself. The prince, however, is well protected by his druzhina of 600 warriors. These valiant warriors have pledged to give their lives for him. "Now is the time for us to sacrifice our heads for you," they tell their prince. The Crusaders mount a charge across the ice in a standard knightly wedge formation against the defending Russians, hitting first the Novgorodian militia in the centre of Alexander's line.

Novogorod Republic

TROOPS 5,000
CAVALRY 1,600
INFANTRY 3,400



ALEXANDER NEVSKY

LEADER

Alexander Nevsky was a politician of rare acumen as well as a great war leader. His rule had alienated the people of Novgorod, but they turned to him when the Crusaders threatened their city.

Strengths: He was a master tactician who used the frozen lake to his advantage.

Weaknesses: Alexander's hold over Novgorod was not entirely secure.

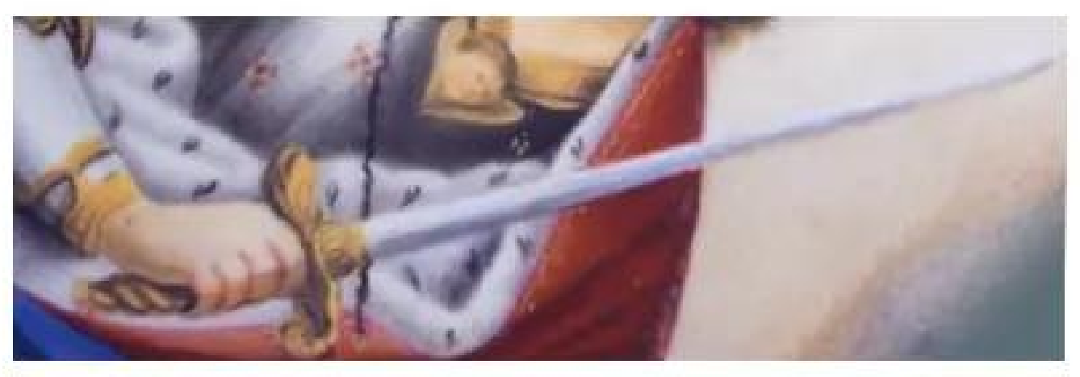
ALEXANDER'S DRUZHINA

KEY UNIT

A druzhina was a personal army of a medieval Russian prince. These mounted warriors, close comrades of their lord, were sworn to fight for Alexander and, if need be, die for him.

Strengths: It had high morale and was well armed and armoured.

Weaknesses The druzhina was expensive to equip and maintain.



SWORD

KEY WEAPON

Russian warriors prized their swords and often decorated them and their scabbards with precious metals.

Strengths: The sword was a potent weapon; with it, a warrior was able to both attack and defend himself.

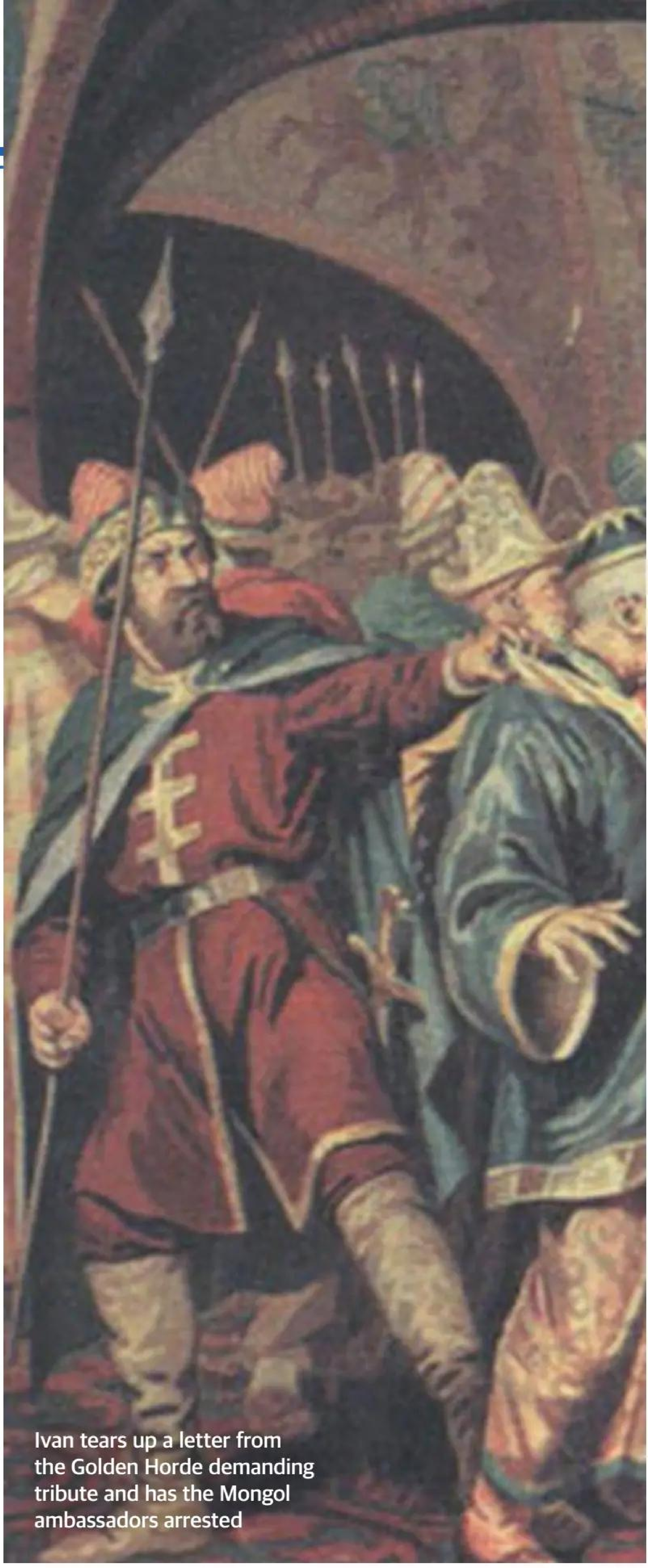
Weaknesses: While relatively expensive, Russian steel was a bit on the brittle side, so swords sometimes lacked flexibility.

Images Getty Images, Nicholas Forder

Ivan the Great

BORN AMID THE CHAOS OF CIVIL WAR, IVAN III WOULD RISE TO UNIFY THE RUSSIAN LANDS AND THROW OFF THE YOKE OF THE MONGOLS FOREVER

Written by Neil Crossley



Ivan tears up a letter from the Golden Horde demanding tribute and has the Mongol ambassadors arrested

Few Russian rulers had quite such a dramatic and tumultuous childhood as Ivan III, the grand prince of Moscow and Russia, whose considerable achievements in unifying and expanding the Russian state would earn him the title of Ivan the Great. Born Ivan Vasilyevich, he was just six years old when his father, Vasily II, was captured, imprisoned and brutally blinded by his conspiratorial cousins. It was 1446 and Russia was in the grip of the Muscovite civil war.

Vasily II eventually regained power with the help of his supporters, but being blind meant he needed help from his eldest son, which is how, at the age of just ten years old, Ivan became co-ruler and regent for his father. He would go on to rule for 43 years. In that time he would radically expand and unify the Russian lands and lay the foundations for the creation of a centralised Russian state, with Moscow as its capital.

Following his father's release, a marriage was arranged for political reasons between Ivan and Maria, the daughter of the grand prince of Tver. The couple married in 1452, and that same year Ivan was placed nominally in command of a military expedition to deal with the remains of his father's enemies in the far north. Ivan was just 12, but he was rapidly gaining hands-on experience in military and government matters. In 1458, at the age of 18, he led a successful campaign against the Tatars in the south.

In 1462, his father died, and Ivan became grand prince at 22 years old. He came to power against a backdrop of feudal fragmentation, with Russia consisting of small, disparate regional state structures, each ruled by a high-ranking noble.

Ivan III was the driving force behind the so-called "gathering of the Russian lands", a concerted drive to annex the East Slavic lands, the Russian territories and the Belarusian and Ukrainian regions. He ultimately brought these nobles under the direct control of Moscow, stripping them and their descendants of their royal titles and land inheritance.

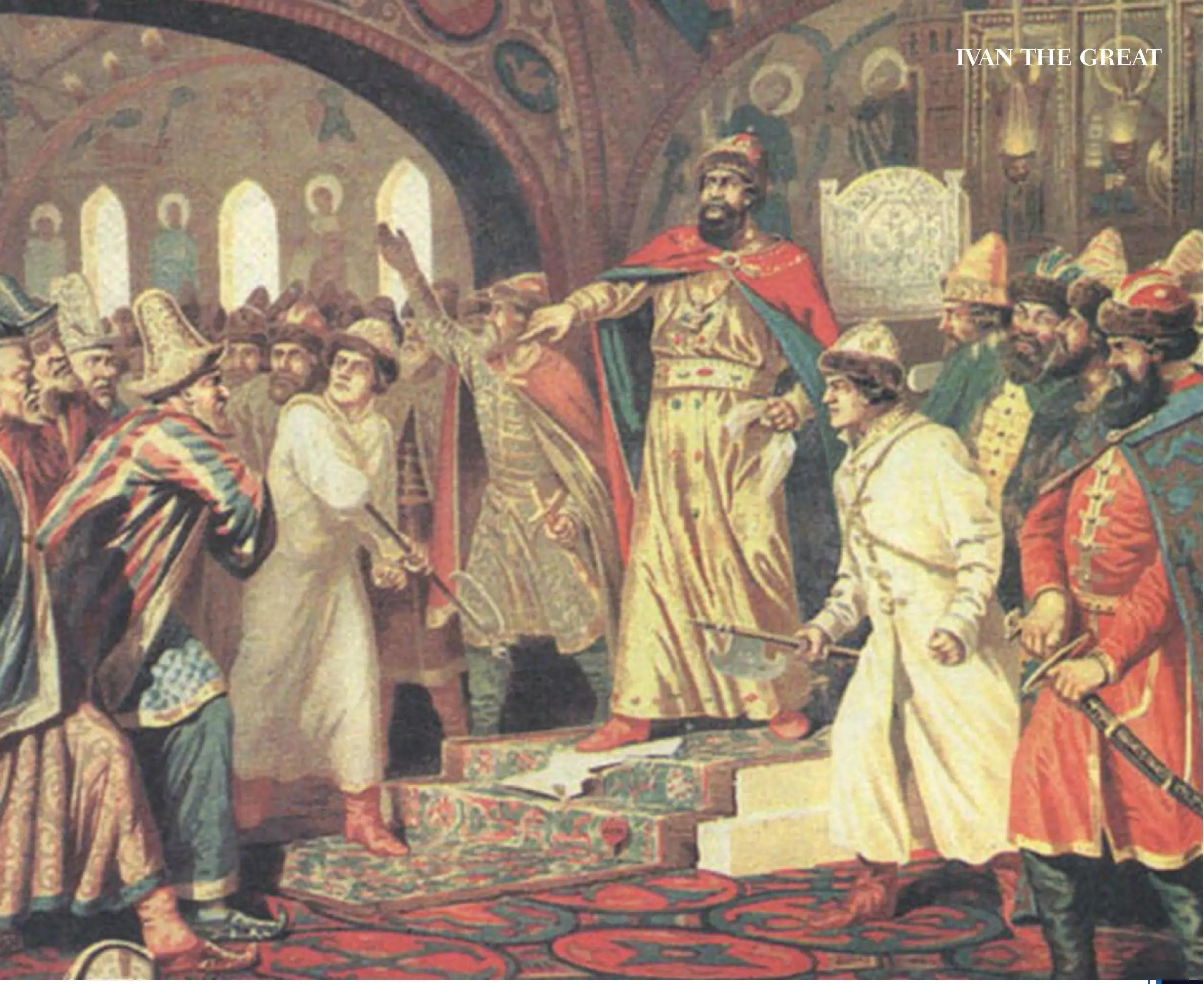
Ivan's first wife died in 1467, but in 1472 he married Sophia (Zoë) Palaiologina, a Byzantine princess and niece of the last Byzantine emperor, Constantine XI. This marriage prompted Ivan to look to the Byzantine Empire as a model. He began using the title tsar, the Slavic derivative of caesar. He introduced complex Byzantine-style court ceremonies and emulated Byzantine governing practices. At the same time, the monk Filofei of Pskov promulgated the idea of Moscow being a successor to Byzantium and therefore Rome.

Keen to gain influence over Moscow, the Vatican supported the marriage of Ivan and Sophia, but they would be disappointed in their efforts to control the tsar, who found his standing greatly enhanced by the status of his new wife.

The Byzantine model was further echoed by a bold and impressive new building programme that took place in Moscow under Ivan. Italian artists and craftsmen were brought in and an array of new buildings were constructed in the Kremlin, with walls strengthened and adorned by towers and gates. In Moscow, Ivan also established Russia's first cannon foundry.

In 1497, Ivan introduced the foundations of a uniform state legislation called the Sudebnik legal code. This was essentially a code of law dictating how boyars (nobles) and court officials were to administer justice.

One territory that was fundamental to Ivan's strategic aims was Novgorod, a powerful Russian state that was run by boyars (Russian



"He ultimately brought these nobles under the direct control of Moscow, stripping them and their descendants of their royal titles"

aristocracy) and wealthy merchants. Novgorod was the centre of the lucrative luxury fur trade, a key factor in the strategic value of the area.

By 1470, Novgorod boyars were questioning Ivan's sovereignty as their prince and appealed to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to send them an alternative ruler. They duly accepted Ivan's cousin, Mikhailo Olelkovich, as their new prince.

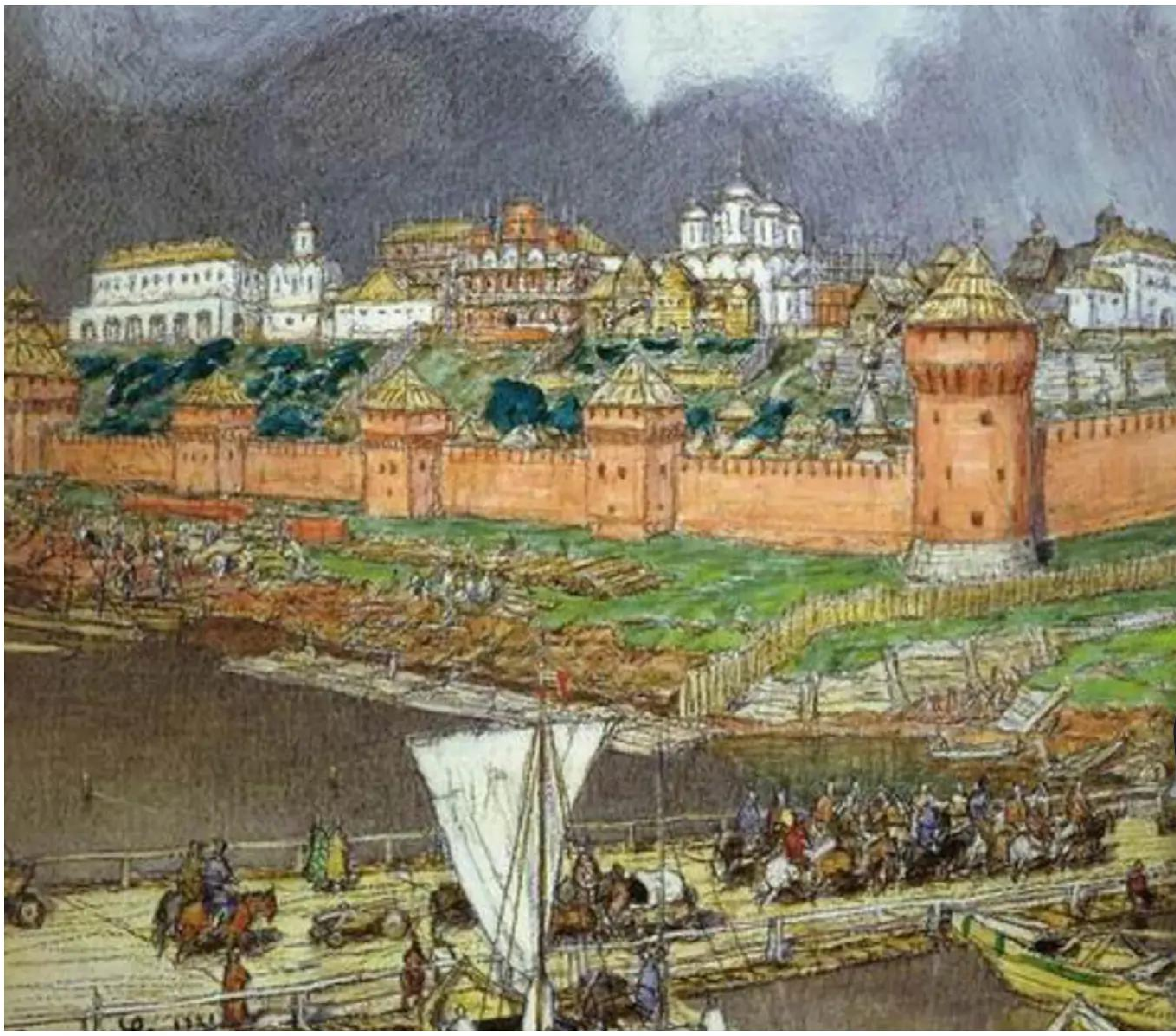
Ivan viewed these actions as a justification for war and led his troops to Novgorod. On 14 July 1471, at the Battle of Shelon, he inflicted a major defeat on the forces of Novgorod. The four leaders of the anti-Moscow insurrection were later rounded up and executed.

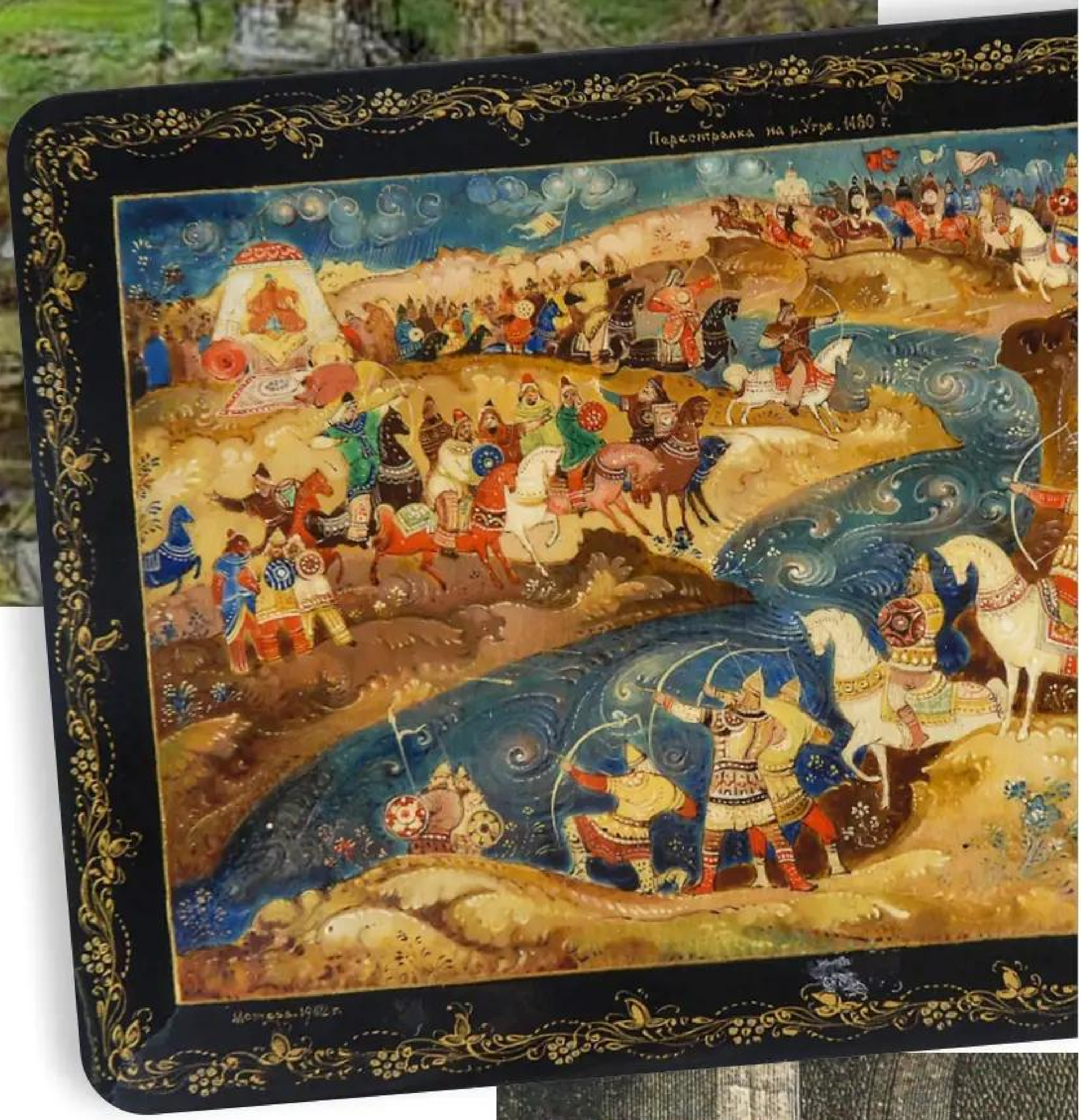
But the conflict did not stop there, and over the next six years Ivan visited Novgorod on numerous occasions, persecuting pro-Lithuanian boyars and confiscating their lands. When anti-Moscow Novgorodians threatened to seek Lithuanian support once again, Ivan and his army marched against them. Surrounded by a superior enemy, Novgorod had little choice but to recognise Ivan's direct rule, and its subjugation was made official on 15 January 1478 when Archbishop Feofil of Novgorod signed a document confirming Ivan's dominance.

Despite this there were further revolts in 1479 to 1488, but once again these were dealt with swiftly, with some of Novgorod's most prominent families forcibly relocated to Moscow, Vyatka and other cities. Ivan ultimately dispossessed Novgorod of four-fifths of its land, retaining half for himself and distributing the other half to his allies. The acquisition of Novgorod almost doubled the size of his realm.

After the conquest of Novgorod, Ivan centralised his administration by stripping the princes of their land and authority. The

Image source: Getty Images, Alamy





Перестрелка на р. Угре. 1480 г.

treatment of the boyars was similarly ruthless, and any who dared to resist were swiftly executed or imprisoned. Ivan's reign also saw the introduction of the pomestie system, which involved the servants of the grand prince being granted estates for their loyal service.

When Ivan came to power many great Russian lands were not under Muscovite control. He set out to reconquer Ukrainian land from Poland-Lithuania and sought to end the historic subservience to the Golden Horde, a khanate located in the northwest of the vast Mongol Empire led by Ahmed Khan. To offset Ahmed's alliance with Poland-Lithuania, Ivan formed a pact with Khan Mengli Giray of Crimea. It was an invaluable union and forged a friendship that would last until the end of his life.

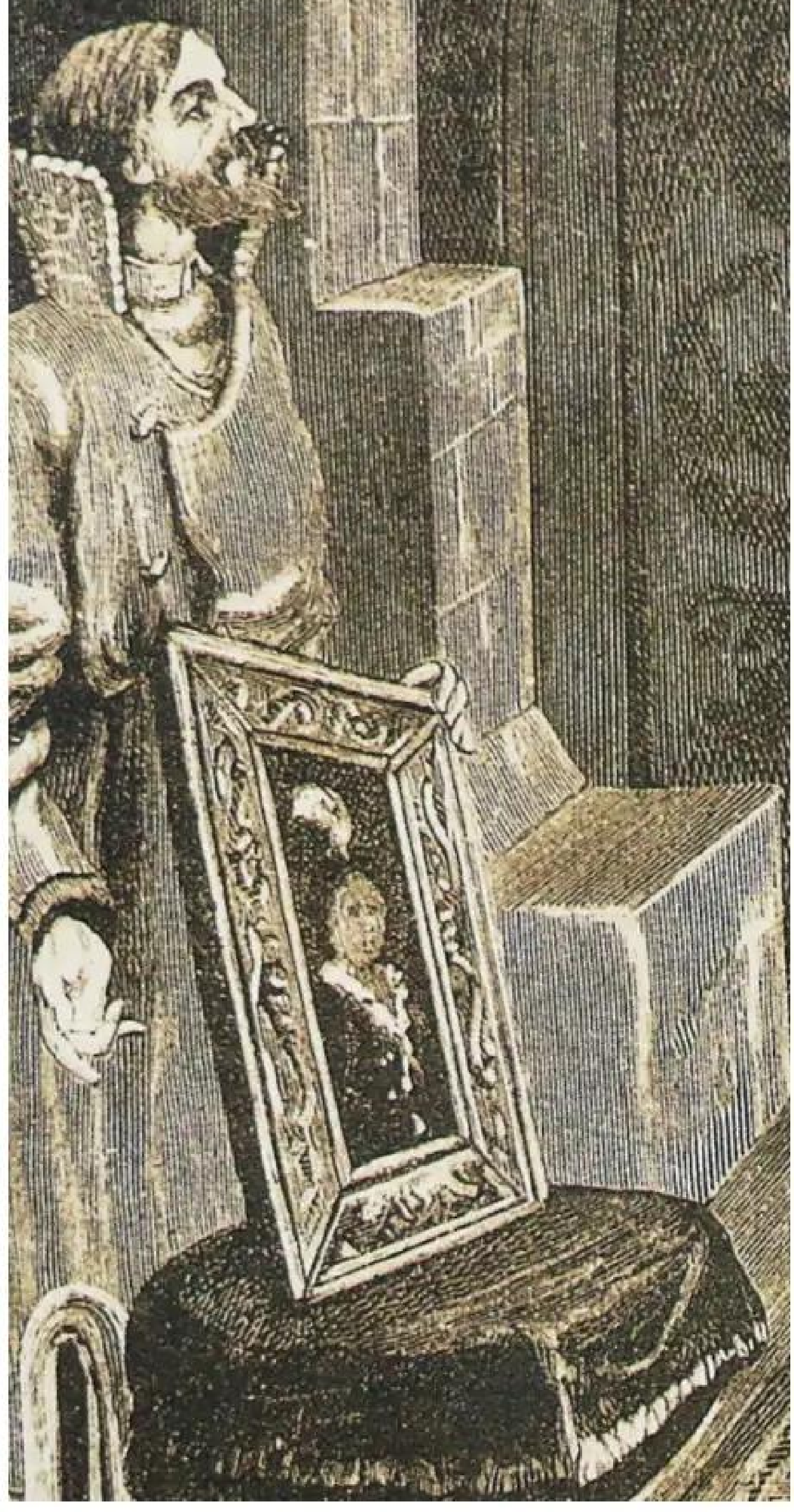
This alliance proved pivotal in 1476, when Ivan resolutely refused to pay allegiance to Ahmed Khan. In 1480, Ahmed launched an invasion of Russia. This campaign culminated in Ivan's Muscovite army and Ahmed's forces confronting each other on opposite sides of the Ugra River, a stand off that ultimately resulted in Ahmed's army retreating into the grassland plains of the Great Eurasian Steppes. The following year, as Ahmed was preparing a second attack on Ivan's Muscovite forces, he was suddenly attacked and slain by Khan Ibak of the Nogai Horde.

Although Ahmed's sons continued to threaten Moscow until their final defeat in 1502, Ivan's position was significantly strengthened by the removal of Mongol rule, enabling him to act as an independent sovereign in the field of European diplomacy.

Under Ivan's rule Moscow played an increasingly prominent role in international affairs, establishing diplomatic relations with the Crimean Khanate and Republic of Venice, the Kingdom of Hungary, the Holy Roman Empire, the Kingdom of Denmark, and the Ottoman Empire.

Towards the end of the 15th century, Ivan focused his attention on selecting a suitable heir. In 1490, when his eldest son by his first wife died of gout, Ivan suspected foul play as his son had been treated by an inept doctor who had been brought to Moscow by Sophia's brother. These suspicions had a huge bearing on Ivan as he set about deciding on who should be his heir.

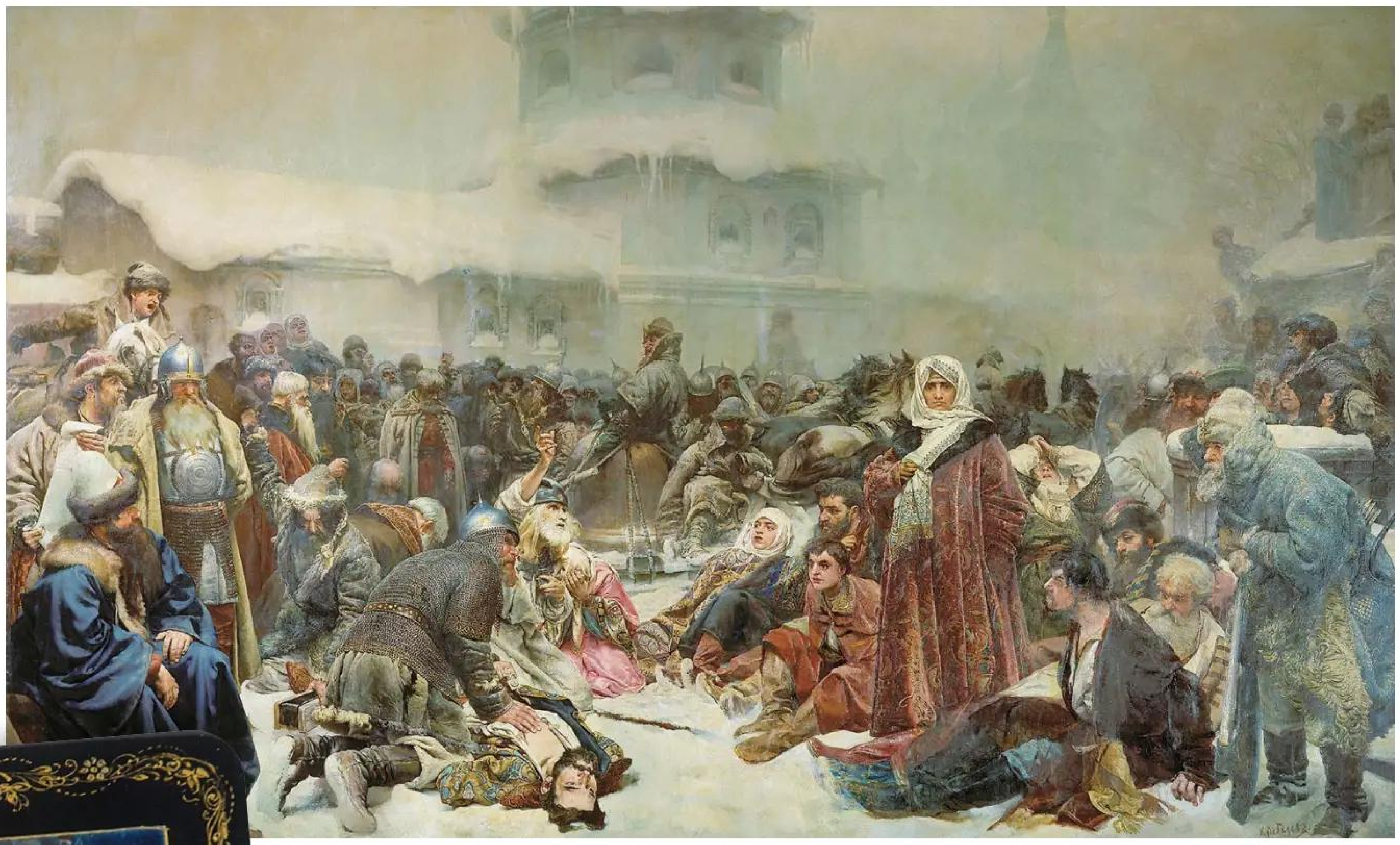
He had two choices – his grandson Dmitry, or Vasily, his eldest son by Sophia. Ivan spent seven years pondering this dilemma before nominating Dmitry as heir in 1497. But Sophia, anxious that Vasily should succeed to the throne, planned a rebellion against Ivan. Her plot was uncovered and she and Vasiliy were disgraced by Ivan, who then had Dmitry crowned grand prince in 1498.

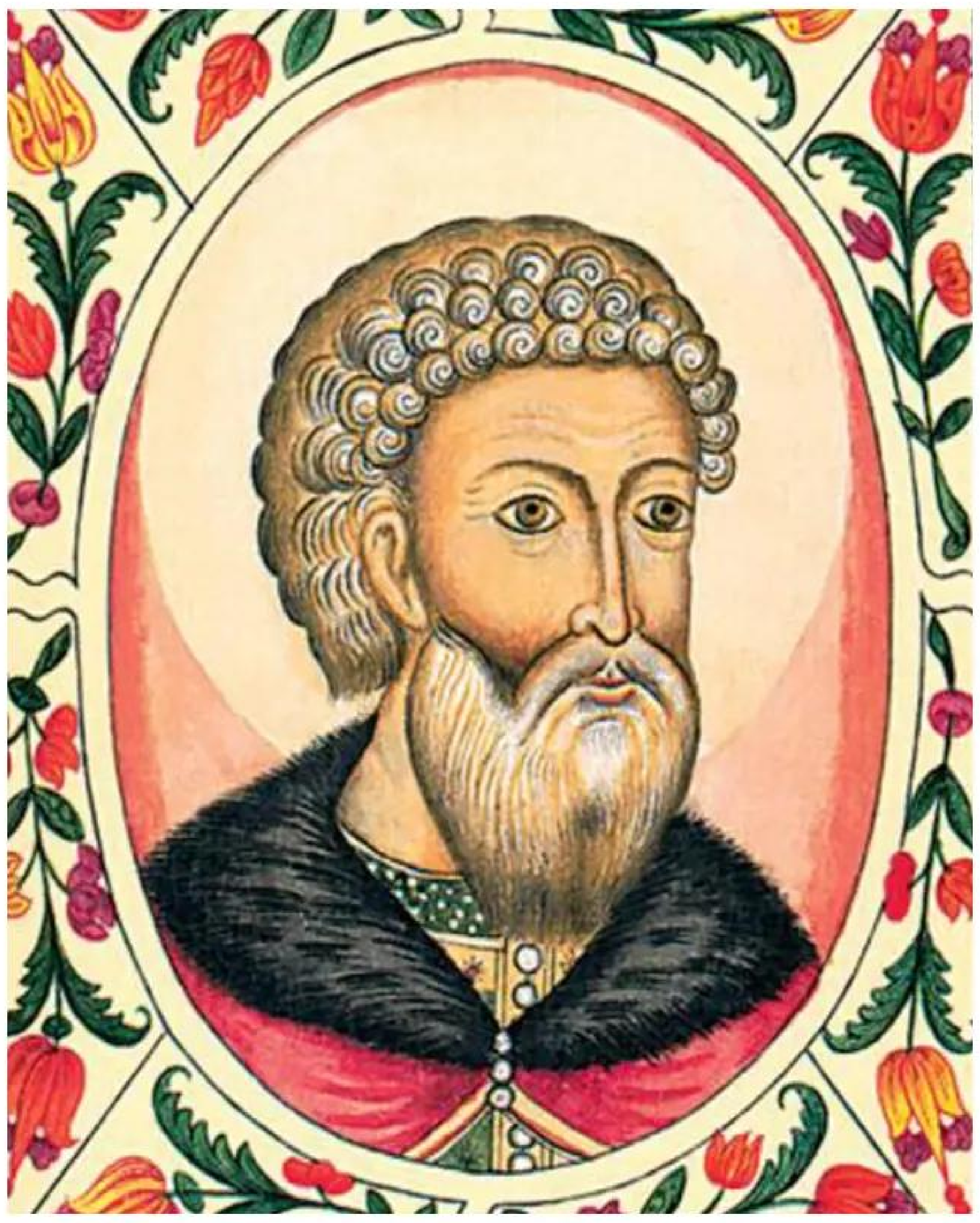


RIGHT An ambassador shows Ivan a portrait of his future wife, Sophia Palaiologina

ABOVE The standoff at the Ugra River marked the end of Mongol influence in Russia

ABOVE LEFT Ivan's enhancements to the Kremlin included clearing a slum in Red Square and ordering the construction of a new cathedral





But two years later, Vasily rebelled against Ivan and defected to the Lithuanians, forcing Ivan to compromise. At that time, Ivan was at war with Lithuania and was unwilling to risk the complete alienation of his wife and son. In 1502, he gave the title to Vasily and promptly imprisoned Dmitry and his mother, Yelena.

For all his military and economic achievements, Ivan III's final years were ones of personal disappointment. The war with Lithuania had ended inconclusively and much of Ukraine was still hostile to Moscow.

It is worth noting that for all his triumphs, Ivan III's reign was marked by decisions that also had a negative impact on the development of the Russian state and its people, as author J.L.I. Fennell noted in his 1961 book *Ivan the Great of Moscow:*

"It should never be forgotten that militarily glorious and economically sound though his reign may have been, it was also a period of cultural depression and spiritual barrenness. Freedom was stamped out within the Russian lands… for the sake of territorial aggrandisement he deprived his country of the fruits of Western learning and civilisation."

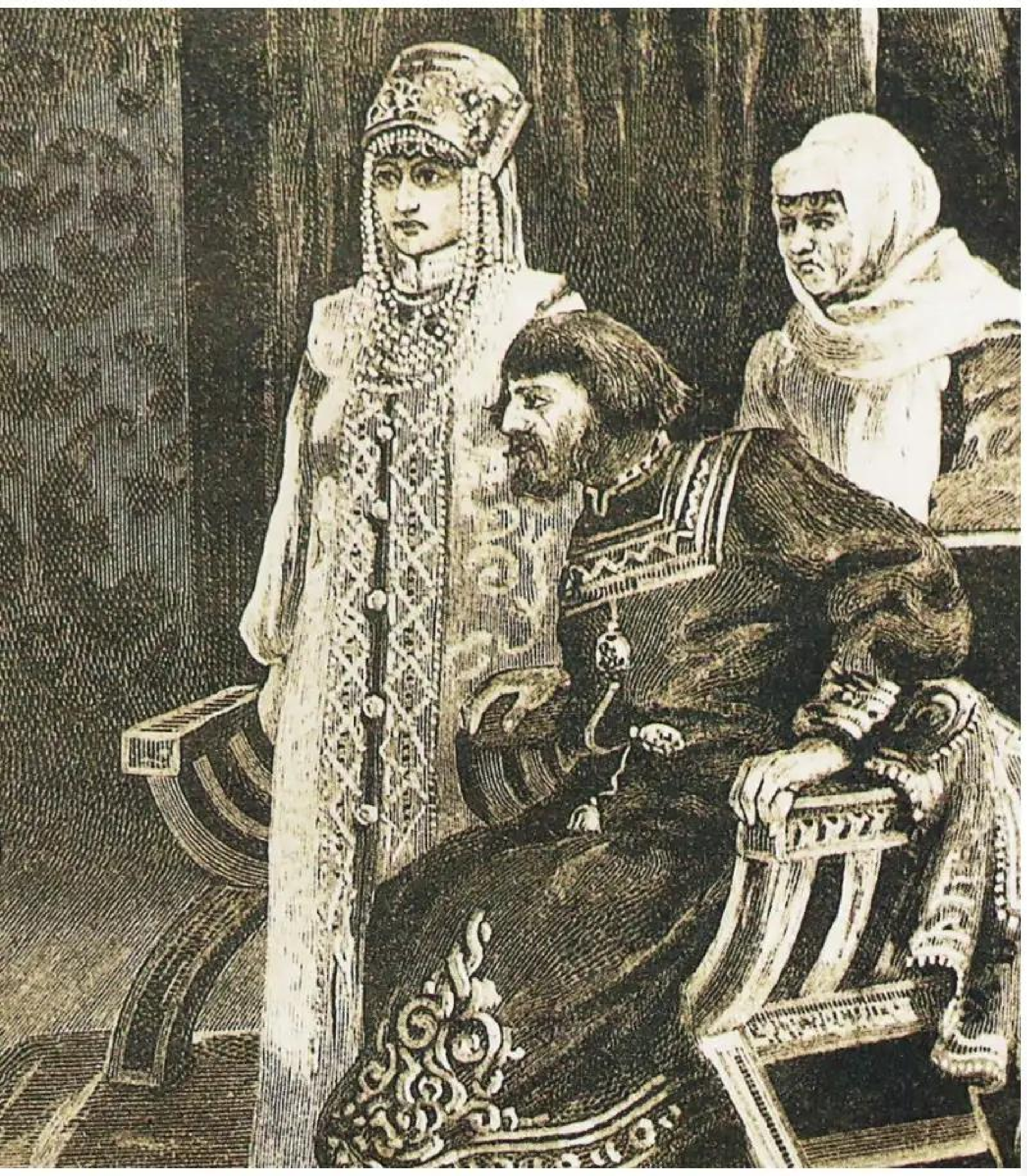
Nevertheless, Ivan III's achievements during his reign were still considerable. He unified the Russian state, tripled the size of its territories and significantly expanded trade. He also established new traditions that would resonate well into the 20th century.

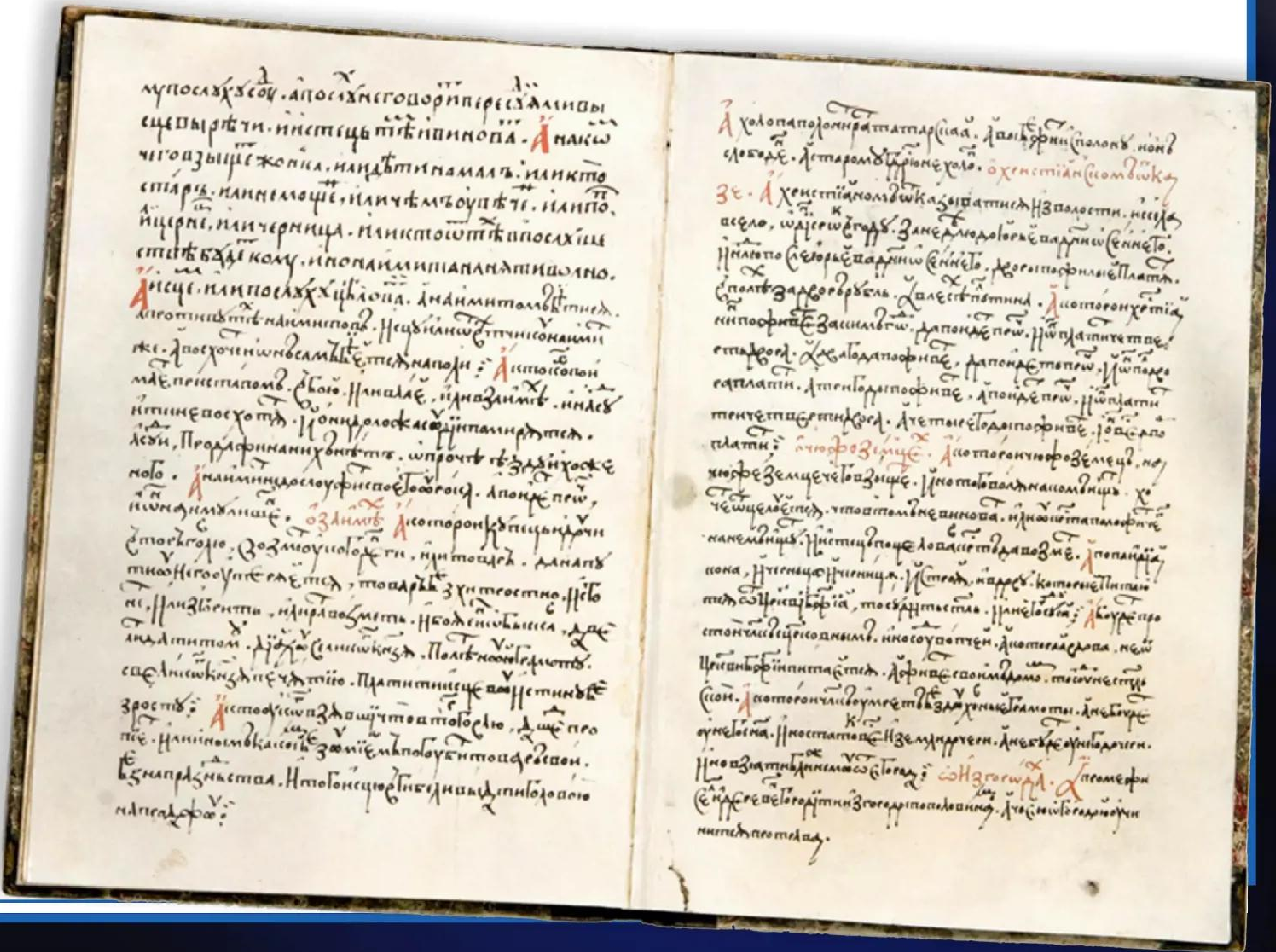
ABOVE LEFT Novgorod was a constant thorn in Ivan's side, but he repeatedly punished its people for daring to stand against him

ABOVE Ivan's life was scarred by conflict. As a child he was hidden in a monastery when his father was captured, only to later be betrayed

BELOW The Sudebnik legal codes revolutionised the law and were crucial in the centralisation of power in Moscow

Image source: Getty Images, Alamy





Holy Russia

NO CHURCH IS MORE MARKED BY ITS MARTYRS, NOR MORE COMPROMISED BY ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH EARTHLY POWER

Written by Edoardo Albert

History starts late for the Russians. They were a pagan and illiterate people throughout the first millennium. However, around 1100, the first history of their past was compiled in Kiev. According to *The Primary Chronicle*, Andrew the Apostle, on his missionary journeys into the east crossed the Black Sea, landed on Crimea and then ventured further north, to the future sites of Kiev and Novgorod, prophesying a great Christian city would rise on the banks of the River Dnieper.

Andrew was the brother of Peter and one of the key Apostles. To be able to claim him as the spiritual founder of your church was a great boost to its prestige. While there's precious little historical evidence to suggest that Andrew really did visit the lands of what would later be Russia, the church in Russia enthusiastically adopted Andrew as its patron saint, even if it would take nearly a thousand years before a church arose in those lands to bring to fruition Andrew's prophecy.

The Christian history of Russia began proper in 988. That was when Vladimir, Grand Prince of Kiev, was casting around for a suitable wife. According to *The Primary Chronicle*, the princes of

Kiev were the descendants of Viking settlers, the Rus', who used the long rivers to sail south from the Baltic Sea to trade and raid. The local Slavic tribes, in a state of constant internecine warfare, decided to ask the leader of the Rus' to be their ruler. Perhaps surprised at the offer, but with an eye on a bigger prize, the Rus' accepted and called their new people after themselves.

The tale is legendary, but there were certainly contacts between Norse traders and Slavic tribes and some degree of incorporation of each other. The dynasty prospered to such an extent that a century later Vladimir sent an embassy to no less a personage than Basil II, emperor of Constantinople, asking to marry his sister, Anna. That the emperor should betroth his sister to a barbarian was unthinkable. However, Basil was badly in need of troops. When Vladimir added a promise of 6,000 warriors to his marriage proposal, Basil decided to lay down his sister for the needs of his empire.

However, it was unconscionable that an imperial princess could marry a pagan. Up to that point Vladimir had been a pagan of positively Conanesque appetites, amassing 800 concubines and almost as many wives while somehow finding time to conquer the neighbouring tribes. But Vladimir was also interested in religion, sending out embassies to inquire into the faiths of neighbouring states. Reportedly he dismissed Islam as a possibility due to its ban on alcohol: "Drinking is the joy of all Rus'. We cannot exist without that pleasure."

That ruled Islam out. But his embassy to Constantinople came back enraptured. They had visited the great cathedral of Hagia Sophia, then in all its glory before its later capture by the Ottomans, and reported that in its golden light they did not know if they were in heaven or on Earth.

Once baptised, Vladimir became the most enthusiastic of converts. He dispensed with his concubines (whether Anna was actually pleased to find herself the sole object of Vladimir's energies is not recorded), tore down pagan shrines and set about establishing the church in his princedom.

This was before the Great Schism, but nevertheless, Vladimir's church was eastern in outlook, ritual, and language. This orientation became more marked following the Schism, when pope and patriarch excommunicated each other and the Church was split.

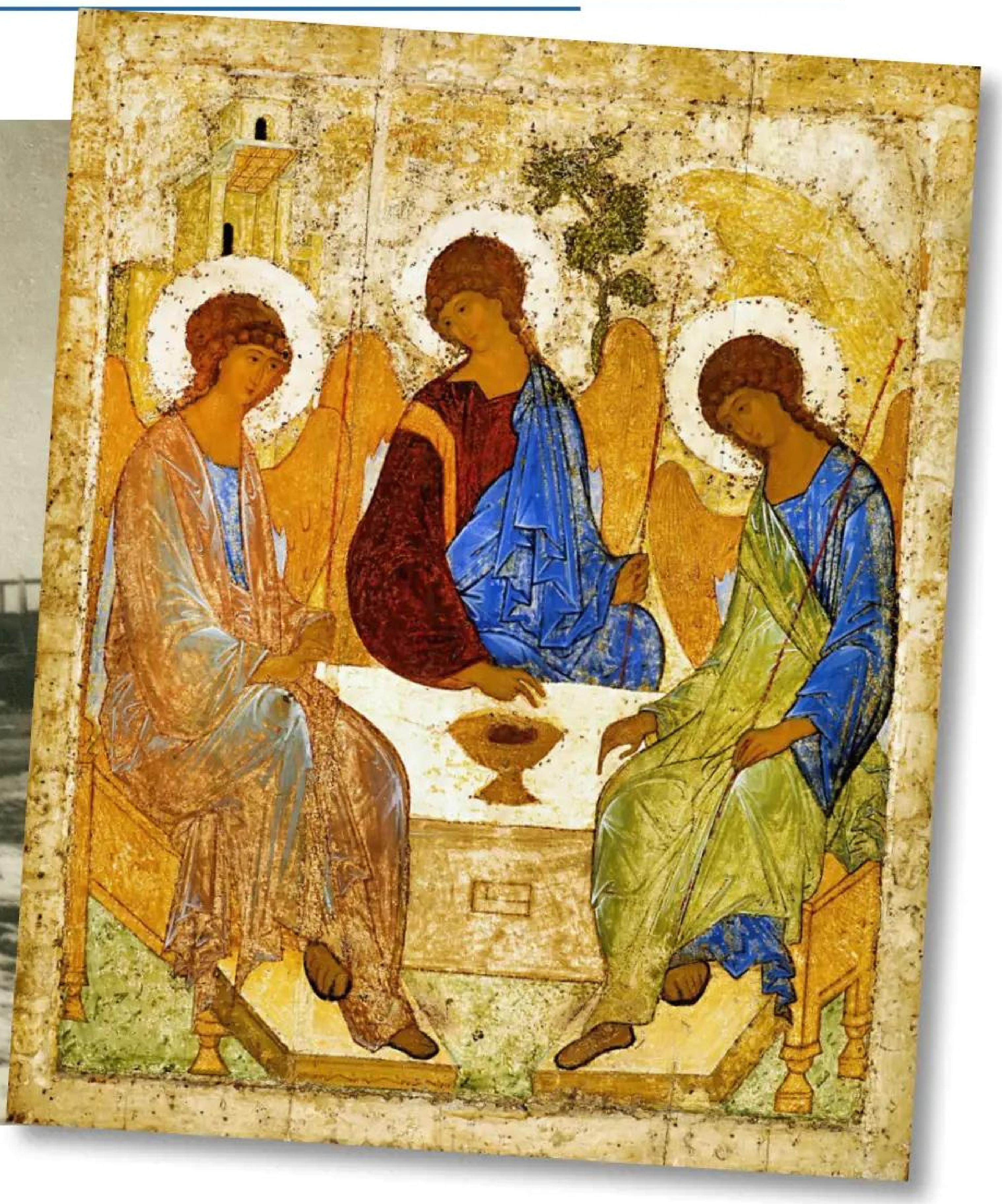
The church in Rus' had a strongly monastic character from its outset, starting with the Pechersk Lavra, the Monastery of the Caves, which was founded either in 1051 or 1074 (records differ on the precise year). This monastic character was strongly reinforced following the disaster of the Mongol invasion, which culminated in the siege of Kiev in 1240 and the massacre of almost all its inhabitants. It took centuries for Kiev to recover from this calamity. Before it did so, the Metropolitan (that is, the archbishop of the church in Rus') moved to the new capital of the princes of the Rus', an obscure and muddy village nearly 800 kilometres (500 miles) to the northwest: Moscow.

The Russian Orthodox Church played a key role in preserving Russian identity during the two centuries in which the country was subject to the Mongol khans. The church supported the grand dukes of Moscow, who in their turn protected and supported the church, starting a relationship that would prove to be as problematic as it was beneficial. But these problems lay in the future. During the period of Mongol domination, Russian religious art reached a supreme peak in the work of the icon painter Andrei Rublev (c.1370–1430). His painting of the Holy Trinity is generally regarded as the most sublime icon ever painted.

Since its founding, the church in Russia had answered to the patriarch of Constantinople: it was he who appointed the metropolitan. But when the Orthodox Church as a whole was disrupted by disagreement over the Council of Florence, which had negotiated an end to the divide between Catholic and Orthodox churches, the Russian Orthodox Church found itself without a metropolitan and unable to have one appointed from Constantinople. Finally, in 1448, the Russian bishops elected their own metropolitan. Even when the break with Constantinople was healed a few years later, the church in Russia continued to appoint its own metropolitan.

The Russian Orthodox Church had become autocephalous (ecclesiastically independent).

RIGHT No one knows how many Orthodox priests and believers died in the Soviet gulags, but the number certainly runs into the tens of thousands among the 1.7 million people who died in the camps



FAR RIGHT Andrei Rublev's *The Trinity* provides, to the believing eye, a window into divine reality

This independence was accentuated after 1453 when Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Turks. The new Rome on the Bosporus had become Istanbul. In response, the church in Russia came to see itself as a third Rome, in succession to the previous two, while the rulers of Russia, having freed themselves from Mongol domination, adopted a new title, tsar, derived directly from caesar. Russia was the new Christian empire and Moscow was its Rome. The tsar appointed himself the protector of Orthodox Christians everywhere while the patriarch of the New Rome was their new spiritual father.

This latter point never sat well with the patriarchs, who continued to have their seat in Constantinople even under Turkish domination. However, with the tsar the most powerful political figure in the Orthodox world, the patriarch of Constantinople had little choice but to raise the metropolitan of Moscow to the status of patriarch in 1589.

At around the same time there arose a profound division in Russian Orthodoxy over the way its monasteries, which remained the spiritual powerhouses of the church, should engage with the world. The crux of the disagreement turned over whether monasteries should possess and own land or not. Land ownership meant wealth, which meant that monasteries could accomplish the sort of social work that no one else did. But it also meant entanglement in worldly affairs, with abbots becoming landlords and, sometimes, not particularly kindly ones. Those advocating for land ownership, the Possessors, won the argument and, with that, an even closer relationship with the state.

This relationship came to a crisis during the patriarchate of Nikon in the middle of the 17th century. Nikon was a brilliant and energetic reformer who wanted to pull Russian religious practices into line with those practised by the Greek Orthodox Church, which he regarded as the font of Orthodoxy. Nikon's zeal for reform unfortunately led to a schism, with the Old Believers clinging to the old way of doing things despite considerable persecution. Nikon also believed that the authority of the patriarch eclipsed that of the tsar. At first, Tsar Alexis went along with this, but not surprisingly he grew increasingly intolerant of this turbulent churchman and had him deposed and exiled.

But Nikon's push for power did not go unremembered by the successors of Alexis. Peter took the throne in 1682. Keen to modernise Russia, Peter left Russia on a supposedly incognito trip around Europe that lasted for 18 months, during which he investigated the latest technology, from telescopes and watches to shipbuilding. On his return, Peter set about dragging Russia into the modern world, willing or no. He ordered all his officials to affect the clean-shaven looks favoured in the West; anyone who refused had to pay a beard tax. On the patriarch's death, he left the patriarchate unoccupied for 21 years before abolishing the office entirely. Peter established a synod to take charge of the church, with a government minister having a key office in the synod. In effect, Peter had taken direct governmental control of the Russian Orthodox Church.

State control continued until the Russian Revolution. Yet, despite this heavy hand, the 19th century saw a significant deepening of Russian religious life. In particular, the starets, an elder who directed the spiritual lives of his followers, reached a luminous peak with St. Seraphim of Sarov (1759–1833) whose face and figure, according to reports, spontaneously lit up with the light of God. Many of the great Russian writers of the 19th century, including Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, were affected by this spiritual renewal.

However, before this renewal could come to fruition, everything came to a grinding, bloody halt following the Russian Revolution. The new Soviet government was atheist to its core and determined to destroy every last

> *"The new Soviet government was atheist to its core and determined to destroy every last vestige of Russia's Christian past"*

ABOVE Patriarch Kirill of Moscow receiving birthday wishes from President Vladimir Putin. Intelligence reports state that Kirill was a KGB agent in the 1970s

ABOVE RIGHT Andrei Rublev was also the inspiration for one of the masterpieces of world cinema, the 1966 film directed by Andrei Tarkovsky

BELOW CIRCLE The baptism of Prince Vladimir of Kiev in 988 was commemorated a thousand years later in 1988 during the period of glasnost in the Soviet Union, allowing for a great renewal of the church

BELOW RIGHT The Russian Orthodox liturgy is long, sonorous and typically accompanied by incense, chant and many candles

vestige of Russia's Christian past: churches were turned into museums, monasteries burned down, and seminaries closed. Tens of thousands of bishops, priests, monks and nuns were sent to the gulags (Soviet concentration camps) or executed.

It was the most sustained assault on a church and its adherents ever undertaken - and it almost worked. The Russian Orthodox Church was reduced to a rump, its leader having to mouth praise for the government that was persecuting his people.

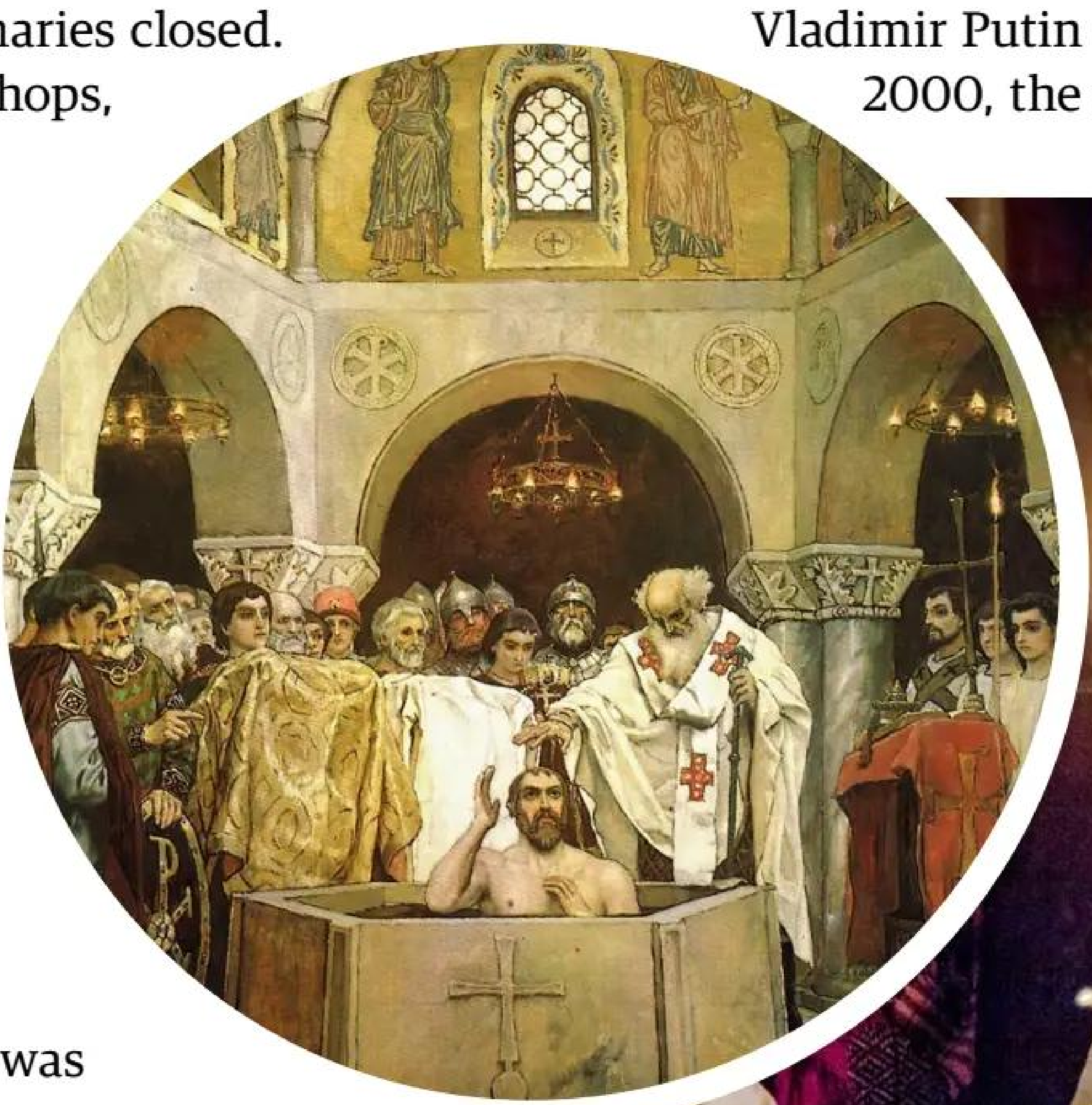
Then, in 1941, Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union. The Russian Orthodox Church immediately announced its support for the government. Desperately hard-pressed, Stalin slowly relaxed restrictions on the church and, in 1943, allowed the church to restore the office of patriarch. After the end of the war, Stalin allowed the church to expand, but following his death in 1959, the Soviet leadership reimposed controls on the church; anyone questioning state interference in the church found themselves under KGB surveillance before a long trip to the gulag.

Then, in 1990–91, there came the miracle: the Soviet Union collapsed, almost bloodlessly. The new Russian state professed freedom of religion. The Russian Orthodox Church, so long suppressed, came back, reopening churches, monasteries and seminaries and renewing the religious life of a people after nearly a century of repression.

Unfortunately, freedom renewed the problem of the relationship of the Russian Orthodox Church to the Russian state. When Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000, the relationship became closer, so much so that critics began to see the church as an adjunct to the state. This came to a head over Ukraine. In 2018, the Russian Orthodox Church broke off communion with the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople when he recognised the Orthodox Church of Ukraine as autocephalous – that is, self-governing and no longer under the authority of Moscow.

Since then, the official Russian Orthodox Church has continued to support the actions of the Russian regime, including its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, although many priests have bravely spoken against the ongoing war despite laws against criticising the government.

Freedom has brought the Russian Orthodox Church to a new crossroad. The next few years will see which path it takes.



The Battle of Orsha

This sea of chaos depicts a brutal clash of arms between the Grand Duchy of Moscow and the forces of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland during the Muscovite-Lithuanian Wars. Fought on 8 September 1514 in what is today Belarus, the battle saw the Polish-Lithuanian army of 30,000 crush a far larger Moscow host (it's said the dead Muscovites blocked the Kropivna River). Victory bought Lithuania some respite and put a temporary end to Moscow's westward expansion. However, the Lithuanians were unable to retake Smolensk, seized by Grand Prince Vasili III on 1 August and subsequently held by Moscow for over a century. Cut from the same cloth as his father, Ivan the Great, Vasili had personally overseen the siege of Smolensk, a crucial part in his successful efforts to conquer the former lands of the Kievan Rus'.

Image source: Alamy

Ivan

The terrible first tsar

WAS HIS MURDEROUS REIGN THE INSPIRATION FOR RUSSIAN DICTATORS WHO FOLLOWED?

Written by Maureen Perrie

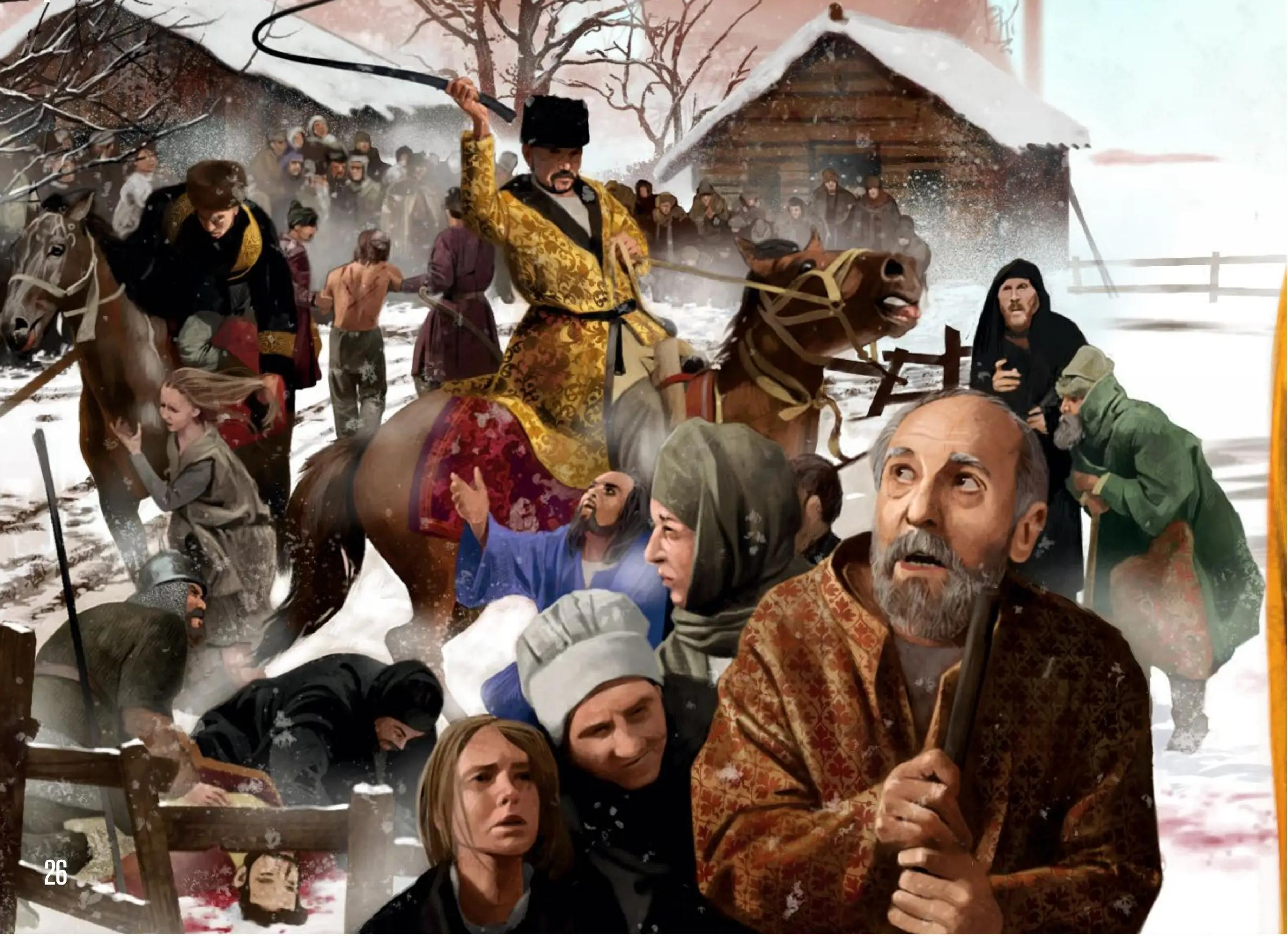


Illustration by: Joe Cummings
Background © Getty Images

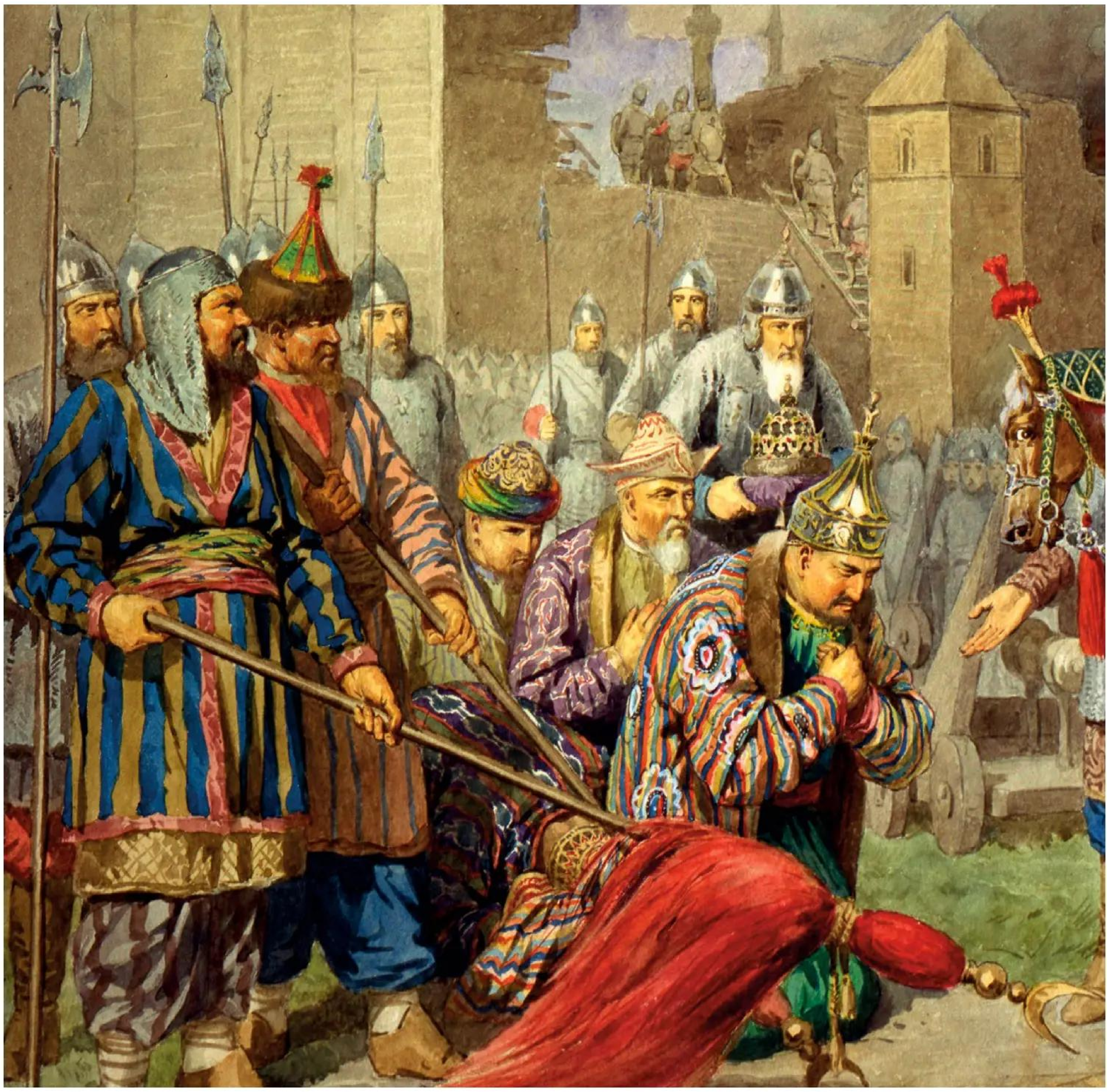
Was Ivan really 'terrible'? The Russian word 'grozny', which is usually translated into English as 'terrible', did not originally have the meaning of 'cruel and sadistic' that it has subsequently acquired. Rather, it meant something like 'awe-inspiring', 'dread', or 'formidable' and generally had positive connotations. But this does not necessarily mean that Ivan's behaviour was not 'terrible' in its present-day sense…

IVAN'S CHILDHOOD

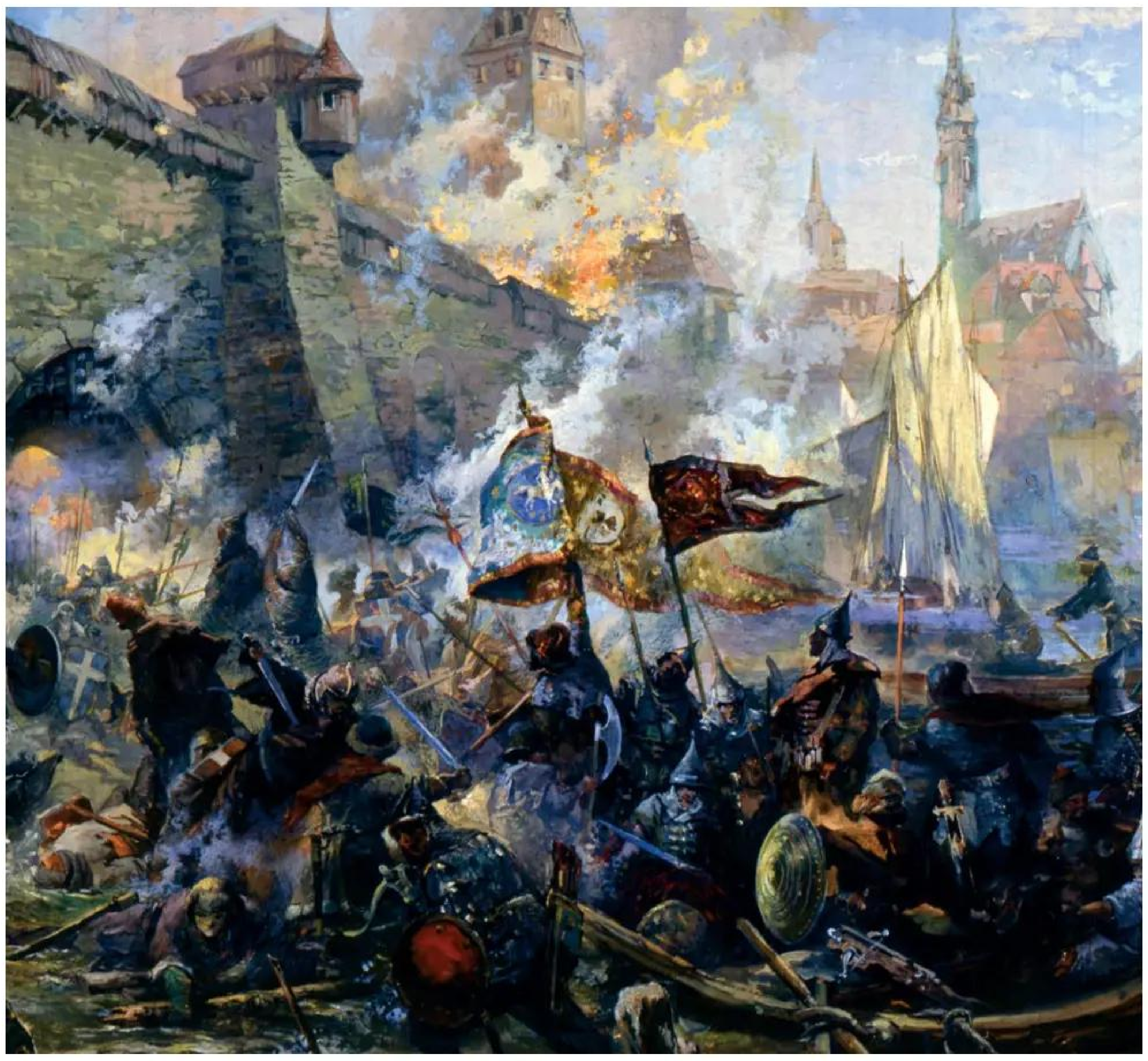
Ivan was born in 1530, the elder of two sons of Grand Prince Vasily III of Muscovy (the name by which Russia was known to foreigners at the time). His father died in 1533, and the three-year-old boy succeeded him on the throne as Ivan IV. Muscovy was then a grand principality that had expanded its territory over the previous century by annexing neighbouring Russian principalities. All of these lands, including Muscovy, had been under Tatar (Mongol) domination since the middle of the 13th century, but by the end of the 15th century Muscovy had become an independent realm.

After the death of Vasily III, his widow, Elena Glinskaya, acted as regent for her small son. Elena died in 1538, and her death was followed by a period of intense conflicts at court for influence over the young Ivan. Various clans of boyars (the grand prince's aristocratic counsellors) clashed in often bloody exchanges. Ivan himself was very embittered about his childhood powerlessness. He later complained that he and his younger brother had been inadequately fed and clothe, and that one of the courtiers had dared to lounge in the royal apartments, "leaning with his elbows on our father's bed" and ignoring the two little princes who were playing nearby. Ivan's resentment of the behaviour of the boyars during his minority may have influenced his attitude towards them later in his life.

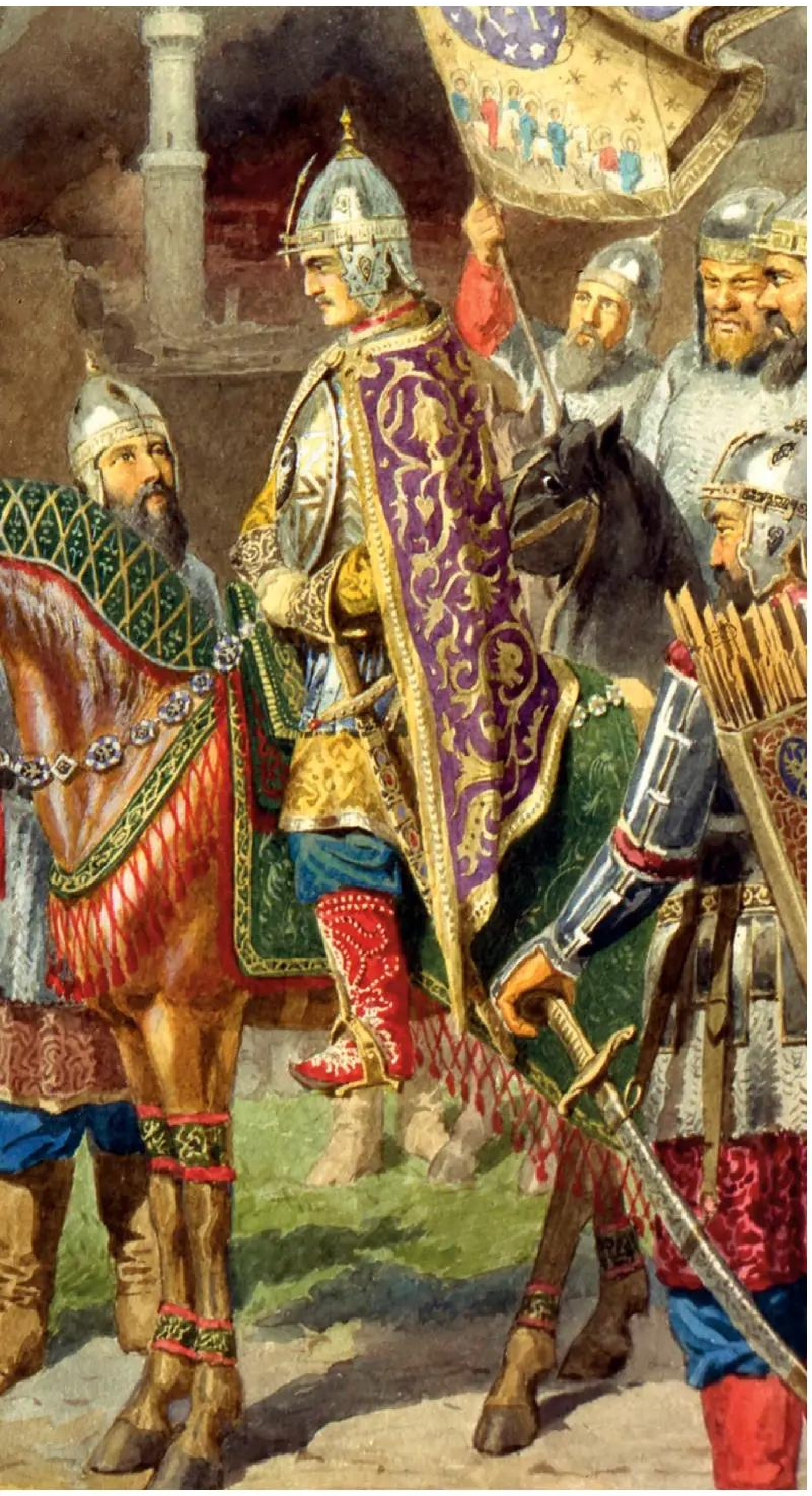
Ivan's alleged ill-treatment at the hands of the boyars in his childhood may also have contributed to his well-documented fiery temper as an adult, but it is possible that he had an innate bad character. The boyar Prince Andrey Kurbsky, one of Ivan's fiercest critics, claimed that from the age of 12 the young grand prince threw small animals from the roofs of houses and that from the age of 15 he would ride through public squares with his rowdy young companions, beating and robbing ordinary people as they went. This, however, was written much later, and Kurbsky could have been influenced by hindsight in seeing the mature Ivan's behaviour foreshadowed in his boyhood.



ABOVE Ivan the Terrible conquered Kazan in 1552. Many of its inhabitants were then massacred



LEFT The Russian army captures Narva (in modern-day Estonia) during the Livonian War



THE TITLE OF TSAR

When he reached 16, Ivan was considered to have come of age, and it was time for him to be crowned. In a break with Muscovite tradition, he took the official title not only of grand prince but also of tsar. The Russian word tsar derived from the Latin caesar, the title of the Roman emperors. But in Ivan's day it was also used for the Tatar khans (rulers) who governed the khanates (such as Kazan and Astrakhan) on the River Volga, which survived from the Mongol Golden Horde that had dominated so much of Eastern Europe in the late Middle Ages. Tsar was also the Russian translation of the title of the Byzantine emperors whose rule had come to an end with the conquest of Byzantium (Constantinople, present-day Istanbul) by the Turks in 1453.

Byzantium had fallen to the Muslim Turks at roughly the same time as Muscovy had liberated itself from the Muslim Tatars, and the leaders of the Russian branch of the Eastern Orthodox Church came to see Muscovy as the successor to Byzantium as the world's only independent Orthodox Christian realm. By adopting the title of tsar, the Russian ruler was declaring himself to be the heir to the Byzantine emperors, who in their turn had seen themselves as successors to the Roman Empire. This continuity was expressed in the notion of Moscow as the third Rome (in which Byzantium was the second Rome). But Ivan's link with Byzantium was more explicitly stated at the time of his coronation by the legend of Vladimir II Monomakh, the 12th-century grand prince of Kiev, who'd supposedly received an ornate golden skullcap (Monomakh's Cap) and the title of tsar from the Byzantine emperor Constantine IX Monomachos.

Monomakh was an ancestor of the Muscovite grand princes, and since he had claimed to be descended from the Roman caesars, Moscow could claim a connection through him with the Byzantine and Roman empires, as well as with Kiev, which had been the capital of the Russian lands before the Mongol invasion but subsequently became part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

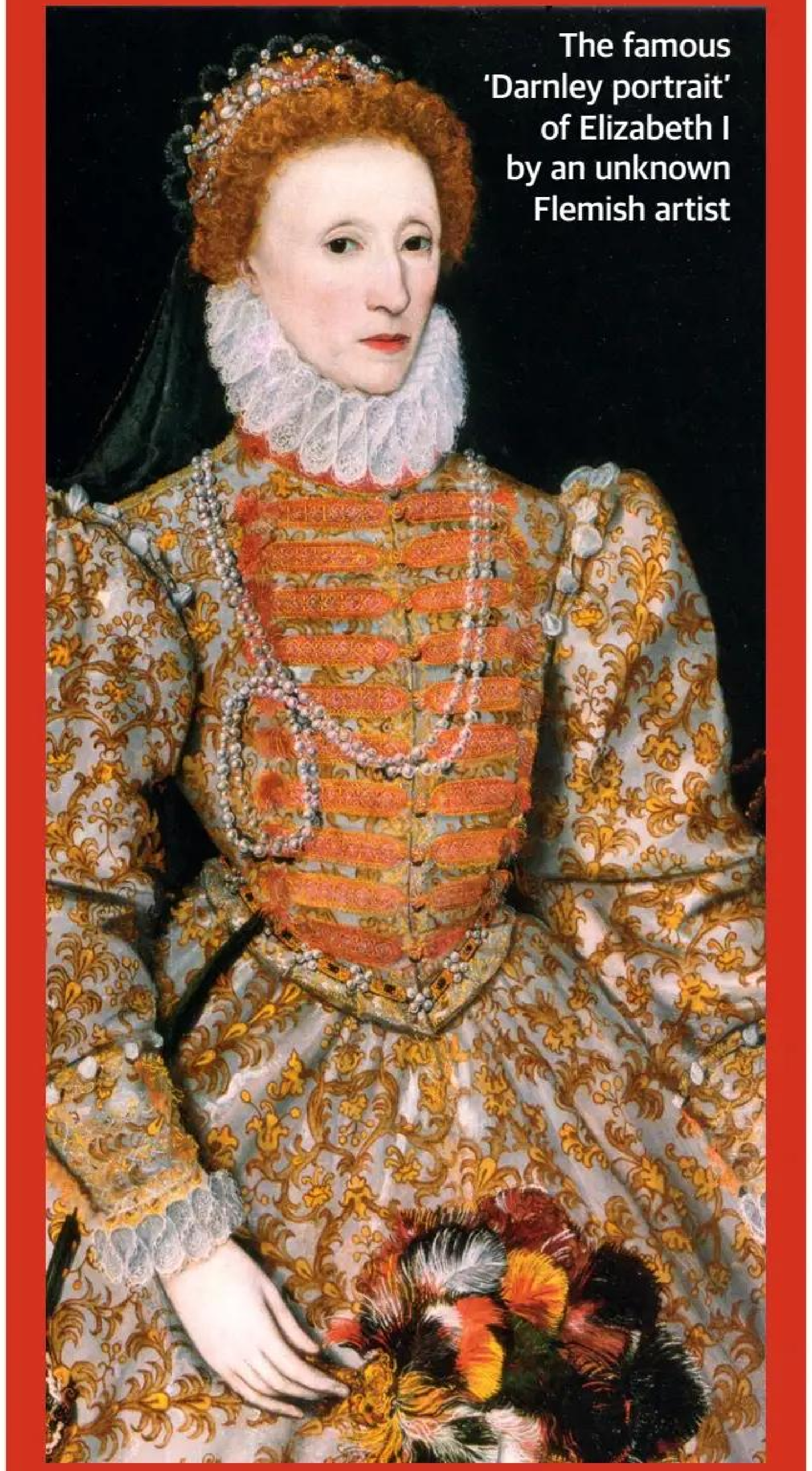
In the ritual for Ivan's coronation, yet another resonance of the term tsar was evoked. It was used in Russian for Old Testament kings, and in the coronation ceremony Metropolitan Makary, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, drew a parallel between the new tsar and King David of Israel. Sixteenth-century Russians liked to present Moscow as the 'new Jerusalem', and they saw themselves as God's chosen people, like the biblical Jews.

All of the ideological baggage that surrounded the young Ivan at the time of his coronation must have given him an inflated sense of the importance of his position. The official idea of the divinely ordained power of the tsar was however at variance with Russian reality, and Ivan was to become increasingly frustrated with the constraints that persisted on his authority, even after he had formally become the Muscovite ruler in his own right. At first, though, all seemed to be going so well...

> *"By adopting the title of tsar, the Russian ruler was declaring himself to be the heir to the Byzantine emperors"*

Ivan and Elizabeth

THE ODD CONNECTION BETWEEN THE RUSSIAN TSAR AND THE VIRGIN QUEEN



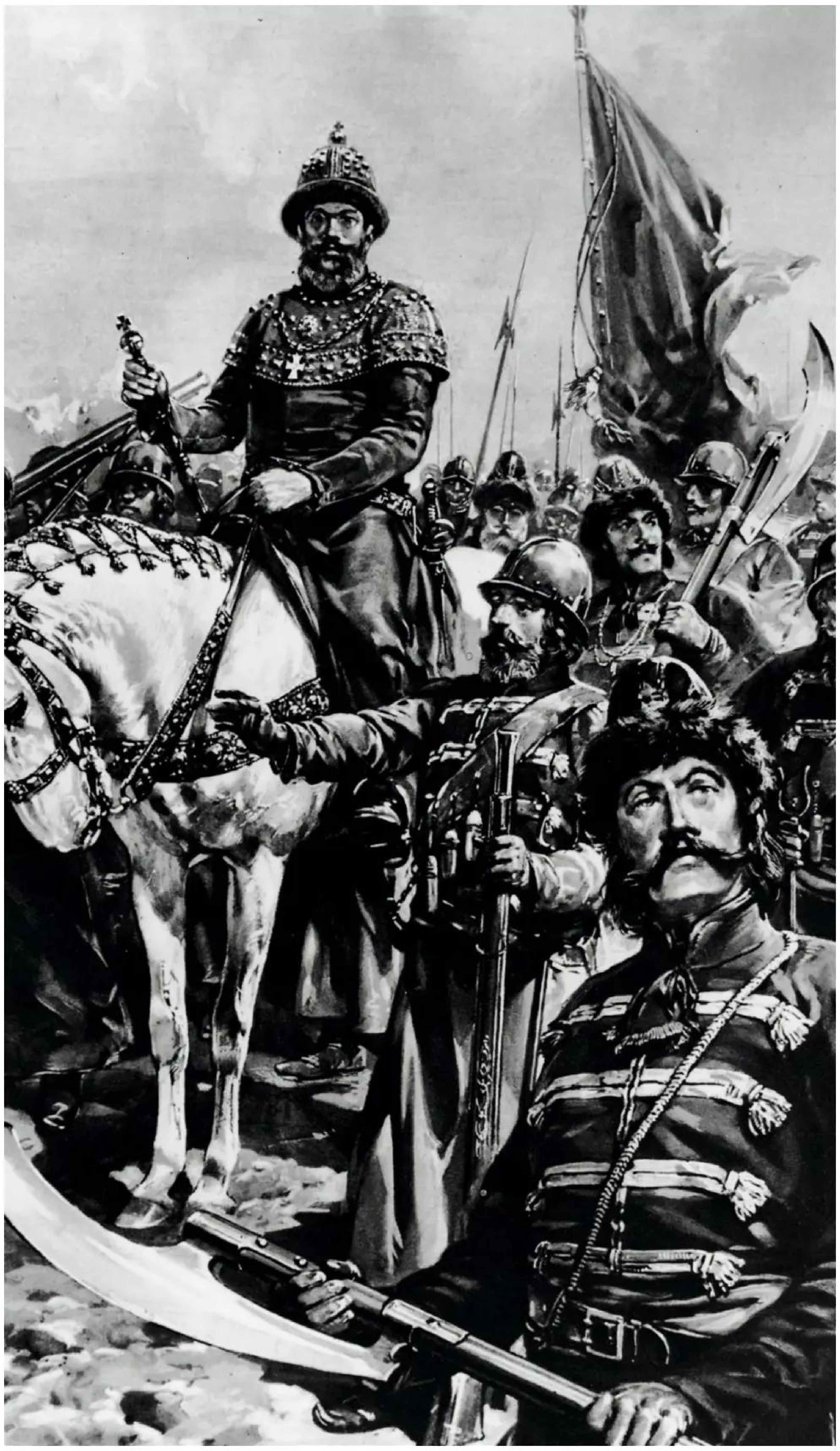
The famous 'Darnley portrait' of Elizabeth I by an unknown Flemish artist

Ivan began a close relationship with England in 1553 when Richard Chancellor (representing the Muscovy Company) visited Ivan's court. Ivan allowed the Company to trade freely throughout the White Sea and the port of Arkhangelsk. Due to his favouritism towards English merchants, Ivan was able to engage in correspondence with Queen Elizabeth herself.

Initially, Ivan thought that he was being offered the hand of marriage, though fortunately for her, Elizabeth was able to dissuade him. After this, their relationship appears to have been one of respect as, at one point fearing a revolt by the boyars, Ivan asked for a guarantee of asylum. Elizabeth agreed as long as he fended for himself.

Despite sometimes being difficult (in one letter Ivan blamed her reluctance to assist him on her being a woman), their relationship was a remarkable period in Russo-Anglican relations.

Image source Getty Images, Wiki/National Portrait Gallery



LEFT Ivan The Terrible, shown here on horseback, struck fear into his enemies

OPPOSITE Many prominent courtiers were arrested then put to death on Ivan's orders

THE EARLY YEARS OF IVAN'S REIGN

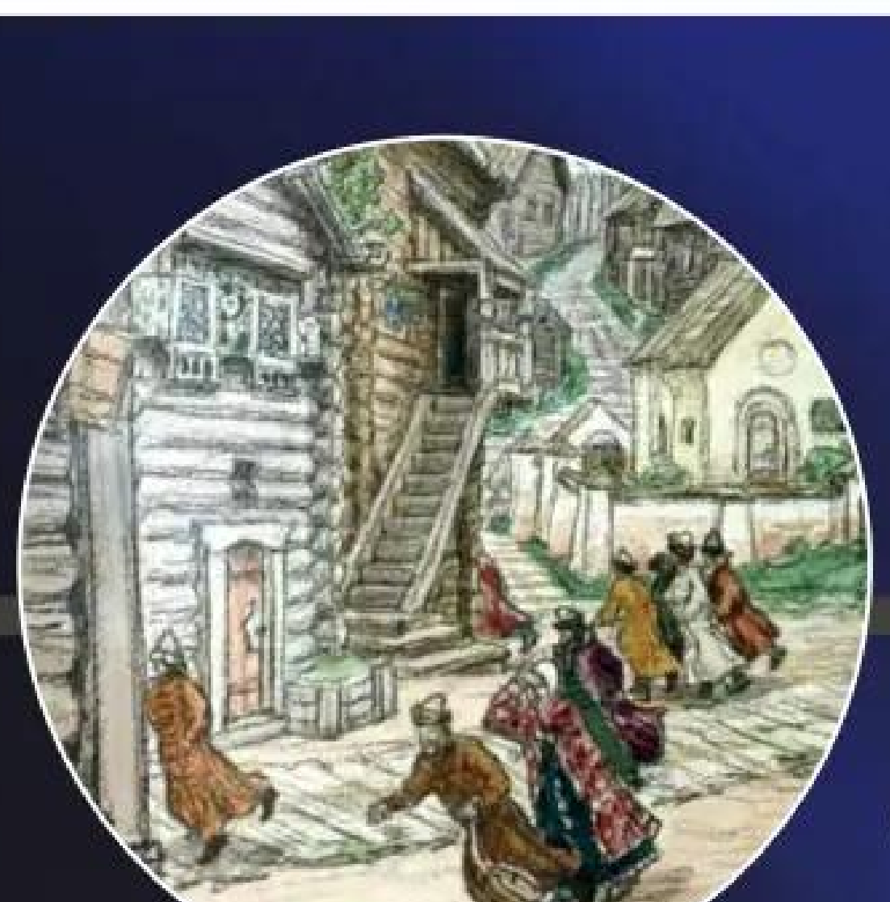
In the course of the 1550s, Ivan's government, led by his trusted advisers, the nobleman Aleksey Adashev and the priest Sylvester, introduced a number of important reforms to the domestic political system, including a new Law Code in 1550 and a series of administrative and financial reforms in central and local government. At the same time, Metropolitan Makary presided over a Church Council in 1551 that led to significant improvements to the administration of the Orthodox Church. The main achievement of the early part of Ivan's reign, however, lay in foreign policy.

In 1552, the Russians conquered the Tatar-ruled Khanate of Kazan, and in 1556 they also annexed Astrakhan, situated at the mouth of the River Volga where it enters the Caspian Sea. These victories meant that Moscow now controlled the entire Volga basin. This opened up opportunities for trade across the Caspian Sea to Persia and Central Asia and created the potential for further expansion into the North Caucasus and Siberia. At the very end of Ivan's reign, Cossacks led by their chieftain, Yermak, defeated the Siberian khan, Kuchum, and soon afterwards western Siberia was incorporated into Muscovy's territory.

The conquest of Kazan was seen as a great triumph for Russian military might and a great victory of Christianity over Islam. The

> *"The cost of the fighting, in terms of loss of life and economic damage, had imposed enormous strains on the country"*

How terrible was 'the Terrible'?



c.1565

Ivan introduces laws limiting the mobility of peasants and adding a clause giving more control to landowners, eventually leading to serfdom.

1565-1572

Creates the oprichnina, a state policy including mass repression of the boyars with public executions and confiscation of land.

1565-1572

This is run by individual oprichnik, state police wearing black and reporting directly to Ivan. They commit many atrocities, once supposedly stripping a servant girl and using her for target practice.

1570

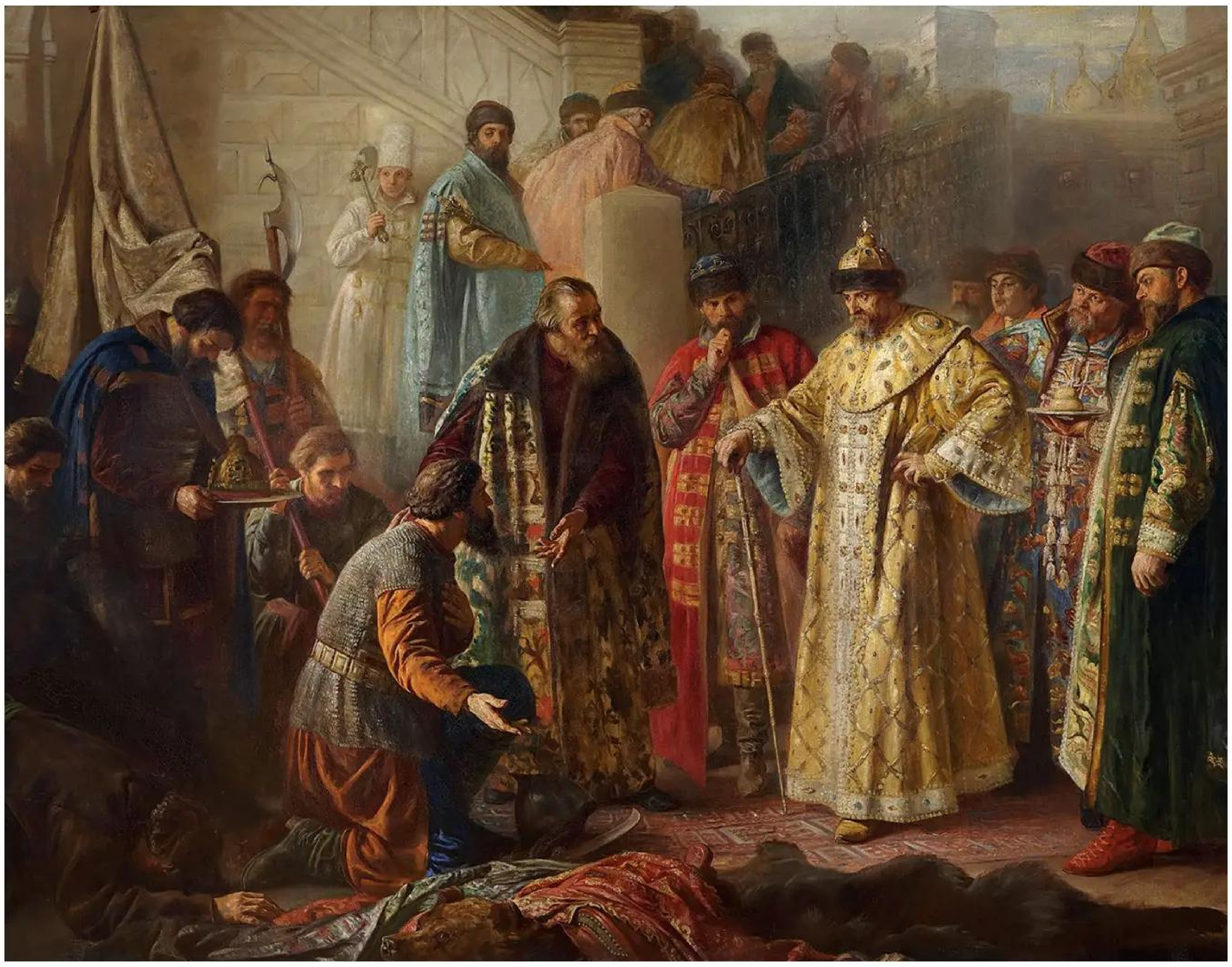
As a reprisal for alleged 'treasonous behaviour', Ivan unleashes the Massacre of Novgorod: anywhere between 2,700-27,000 are killed and the cruelty is extreme.

c.1565-1572

Jerome Horsey writes how Prince Boris Tepula is impaled in front of his own mother, who is then forced to watch as he takes 15 hours to die.

annexation of the khanate seemed to justify Ivan's adoption of the title of tsar in the sense of 'khan', while the title in its sense of 'emperor' was validated by Muscovy's acquisition of its own empire: territory inhabited by many non-Russian and non-Christian peoples. The capture of the Volga khanates was also used to strengthen Ivan's imperial claim of continuity with Kiev, Byzantium and Rome. An inventive literary work, the *History of Kazan*, declared that the Russians had now regained lands that before the Mongol invasion had belonged to Ivan's ancestor, the 10th-century Prince Vladimir of Kiev.

Emboldened by these successes in the east, Ivan turned his attention to the west, where he also hoped to acquire territory that had once been controlled by the grand princes of Kiev. Important commercial ports on the eastern Baltic Sea had been occupied since the 13th century by the Livonian Knights, a Germanic military order, which obstructed trade between Muscovy and western Europe. On the pretext that the Knights had refused to pay him an obsolete tribute, Ivan's troops invaded Livonia in 1558. Their initial campaign was successful, and the Russians seized a number of towns in present-day Estonia, including the port of Narva. But Ivan was unable to maintain the momentum, and the Livonian War dragged on for a quarter of a century, involving not just Muscovy and Livonia but all the other major powers in the region: Poland-Lithuania, Denmark, and Sweden. By the time the war eventually ended, Ivan had been forced to surrender most of his gains, and the cost of the fighting, in terms of loss of life and economic damage, had imposed enormous strains on the country. Against the background of failures in the Livonian War, the tsar's became suspicious of treasonous intentions on the part of his boyars and military commanders, many of whom did in fact defect.



By the beginning of the 1560s, Ivan had already fallen out with his leading advisers, probably because he felt they had excessive influence on policy decisions. Adashev and Sylvester were dismissed in 1560. The tsar's cousin, Prince Vladimir Staritsky, who was at that time the only adult member of the royal family with a potential claim to the throne, fell into disgrace in 1563. A number of other prominent courtiers were arrested, and some were executed. We do not know exactly what lay behind these repressions: the victims were usually only accused vaguely of 'treason'. In April 1564, one of the tsar's leading generals, Prince Andrey Kurbsky, fled to Lithuania and wrote to Ivan accusing him of shedding innocent Christian blood. The tsar was evidently stung by this challenge to his self-image as a benevolent, divinely appointed monarch, and he dispatched a lengthy reply, asserting his right to reward or punish his subjects as he saw fit.

But Ivan didn't just challenge his opponents in writing: within a few months he had taken drastic action against them.

THE OPRICHNINA AND THE REIGN OF TERROR

In December 1564, Ivan left Moscow with his family and announced that he had abdicated. He agreed to return only on the condition that he divide the country into two parts. One of

THERE'S A PLETHORA OF GRUESOME HORROR STORIES SURROUNDING IVAN, BUT JUST HOW CRUEL WAS HE IN REALITY?

1570

Ivan then targets members of his own court. Treasurer Nikita Funikov is boiled alive, Ivan Viskovaty (counsellor) is hung and dismembered, and an unnamed boyar is tied to a barrel of gunpowder that is then detonated.

1580

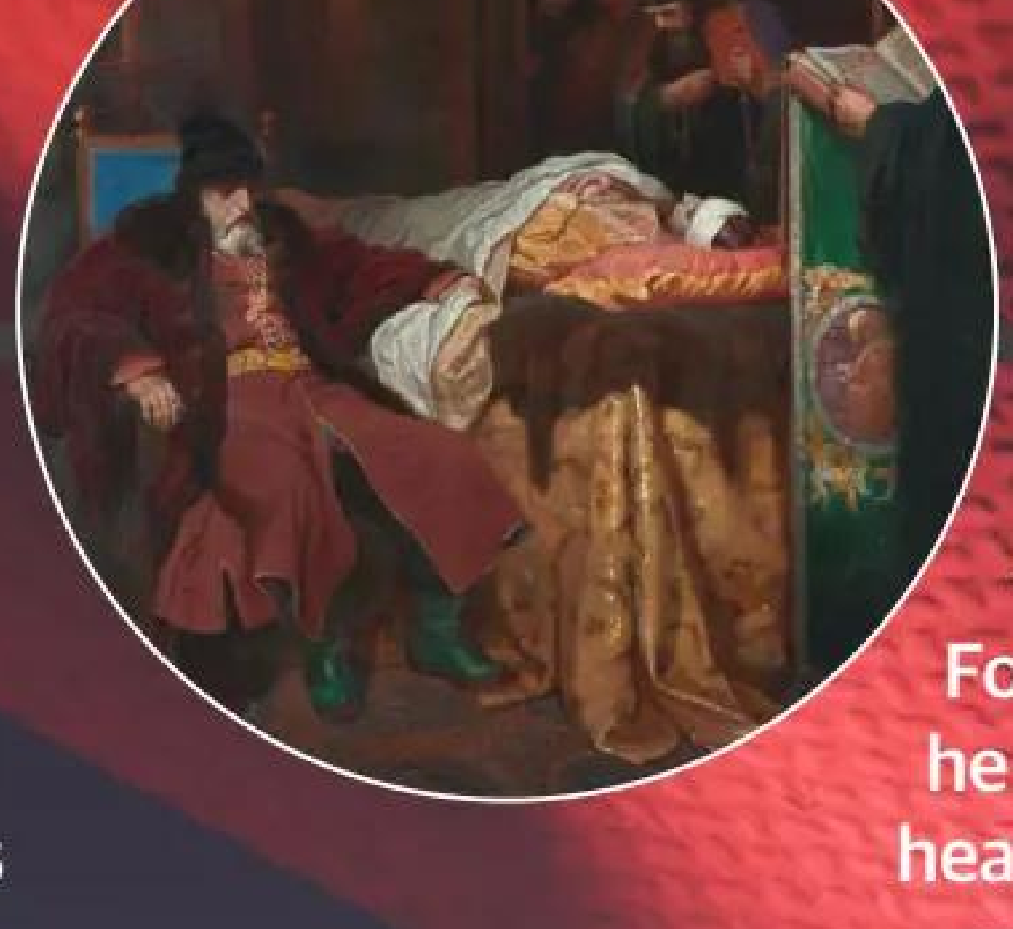
Maria Dolgorukaya, Ivan's seventh wife, is drowned the day after their wedding when he discovers she's not a virgin.

1581

Ivan beats his pregnant daughter-in-law for wearing immodest clothing.

1581

She miscarries, and it's believed the severity of his beating caused her to.



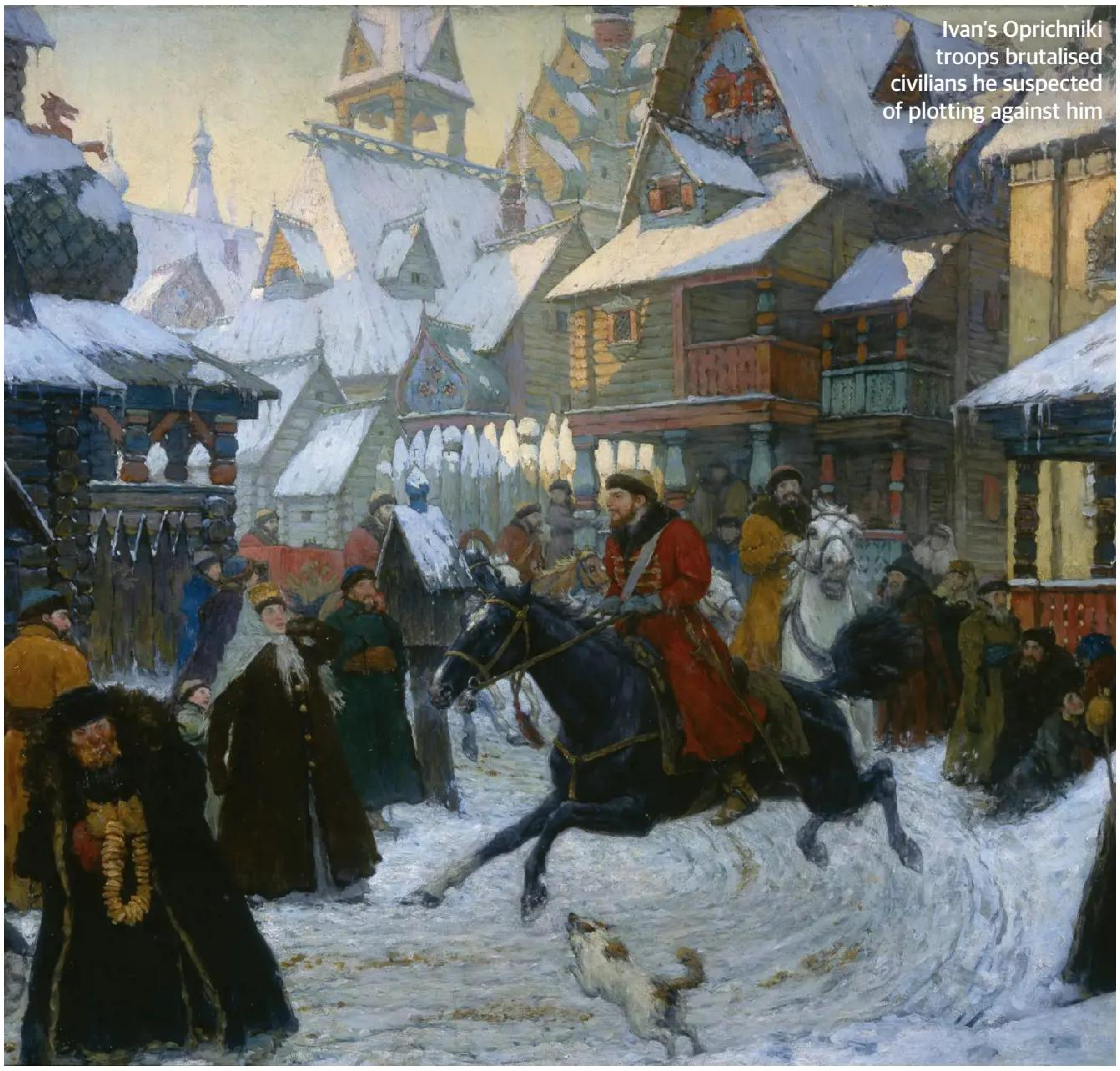
1581

Following this, he engages in a heated argument with his son, striking him with his staff and killing him.

Image source Getty Images, wiki/Ekaterinburg Museum of Fine Arts these, the zemshchina (the 'land') was to be administered by the boyars; the other, the oprichnina, would come directly under the tsar's own control. Within the oprichnina Ivan created his special bodyguard, the Oprichniki, who in practice were allowed to terrorise the zemshchina. The greatest atrocity associated with the oprichnina occurred in 1570, when Ivan launched a punitive raid on the great trading city of Novgorod, in the northwest of Russia, accusing its inhabitants of plotting treason against him. After massacring the citizens and looting or destroying their property, the tsar returned to Moscow, where he held mass public executions of those accused of complicity in the treason of Novgorod. In 1571, taking advantage of the chaotic situation in Russia, the Crimean khan invaded from the south and burned much of Moscow. The following year the khan invaded again, but this time he was decisively defeated by Ivan's troops. Nevertheless, the tsar seems to have blamed the oprichniki for his humiliation in the previous year, and later in 1572 he abolished the oprichnina as suddenly as he had introduced it.

Historians are still puzzled by many aspects of the oprichnina. Some attribute it to madness on Ivan's part, although there is no evidence for a diagnosis of anything that modern psychiatrists would regard as mental illness. It seems most likely that Ivan had some obscure political purpose – probably to remove or prevent the formation of opposition to his rule by dividing the elite. By moving landholders from the zemshchina territory to that of the oprichnina, and vice versa, he weakened their base of support in their traditional localities. But contrary to the view of some historians, Ivan's terror was not directed exclusively, or even primarily, against the boyars – all sections of society suffered. It was mainly because of the reign of terror from 1565 to 1572 that scholars came to regard the epithet 'grozny', in the modern sense of 'terrible', as a justifiable description of the tsar. Surprisingly, Ivan's image in folklore is more positive. Perhaps because of the demagogic and populist elements in the rhetoric that the tsar directed against his victims, folksongs and folktales depict him as the champion of the ordinary people against their common enemies: 'traitor-boyars' and corrupt officials.

> *"Ivan's terror was not directed exclusively, or even primarily, against the boyars – all sections of society suffered"*



Ivan's Oprichniki troops brutalised civilians he suspected of plotting against him

IVAN'S LAST YEARS

After the abolition of the oprichnina, Ivan's rule became less blood-soaked, although his repressive policies and eccentric behaviour continued. His personal life was increasingly chaotic. After the death in 1569 of his second wife, the Circassian princess Maria Temryukovna, Ivan married again five more times, although the legitimacy of his later marriages was dubious.

In 1581, Tsarevich Ivan Ivanovich, the elder of Ivan's two surviving sons from his first marriage and the heir to the throne, died suddenly. According to rumours that are generally believed by historians, Tsarevich Ivan was accidentally killed by his father as the result of an angry quarrel. The tsar was consumed with grief and guilt and donated vast sums of money to monasteries in remembrance of his son. He also had lists compiled of all those who had been put to death during his reign and sent them to monasteries with further huge donations for the commemoration of their souls. Although they do not include all those who died, these lists provide historians with a major source of evidence for the identities and numbers (they refer to over 3,000 people) of the victims of Ivan's reign of terror.

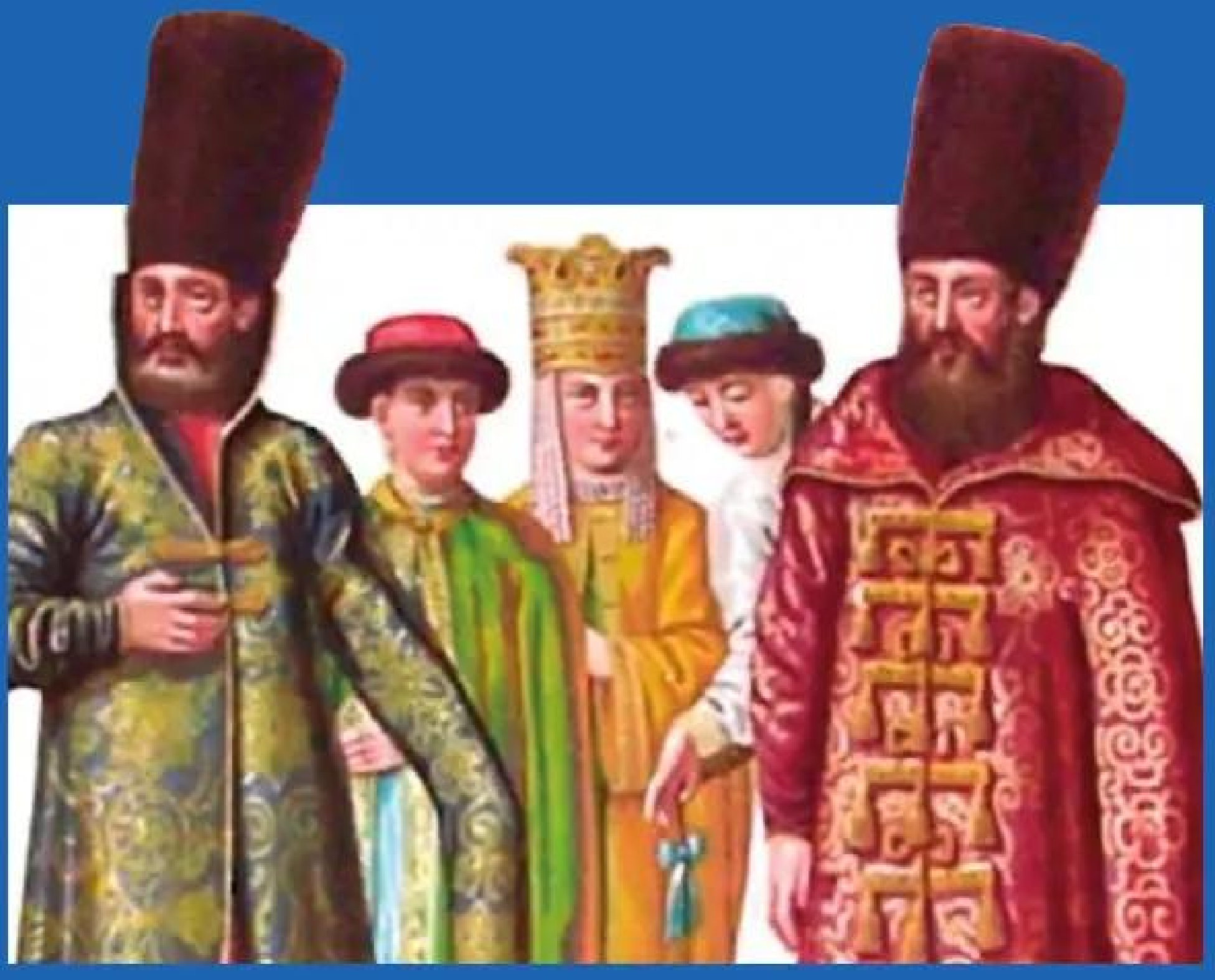
The death of Tsarevich Ivan may have affected his father's health: certainly the tsar did not survive his son for long. On 18 March 1584, Ivan collapsed and died while playing chess with one of his courtiers. Rumours quickly spread that the tsar had been poisoned, but this seems to have been merely gossip.

IVAN'S LEGACY

Ivan was succeeded by his son Feodor, who was both physically and mentally feeble. Feodor's ambitious brother-in-law, the boyar Boris Godunov, acted as de facto regent, and when Feodor died in 1598 without leaving an heir, Boris became tsar. However, Boris' legitimacy was always in doubt, especially since he was suspected of having ordered the

Who were the boyars?

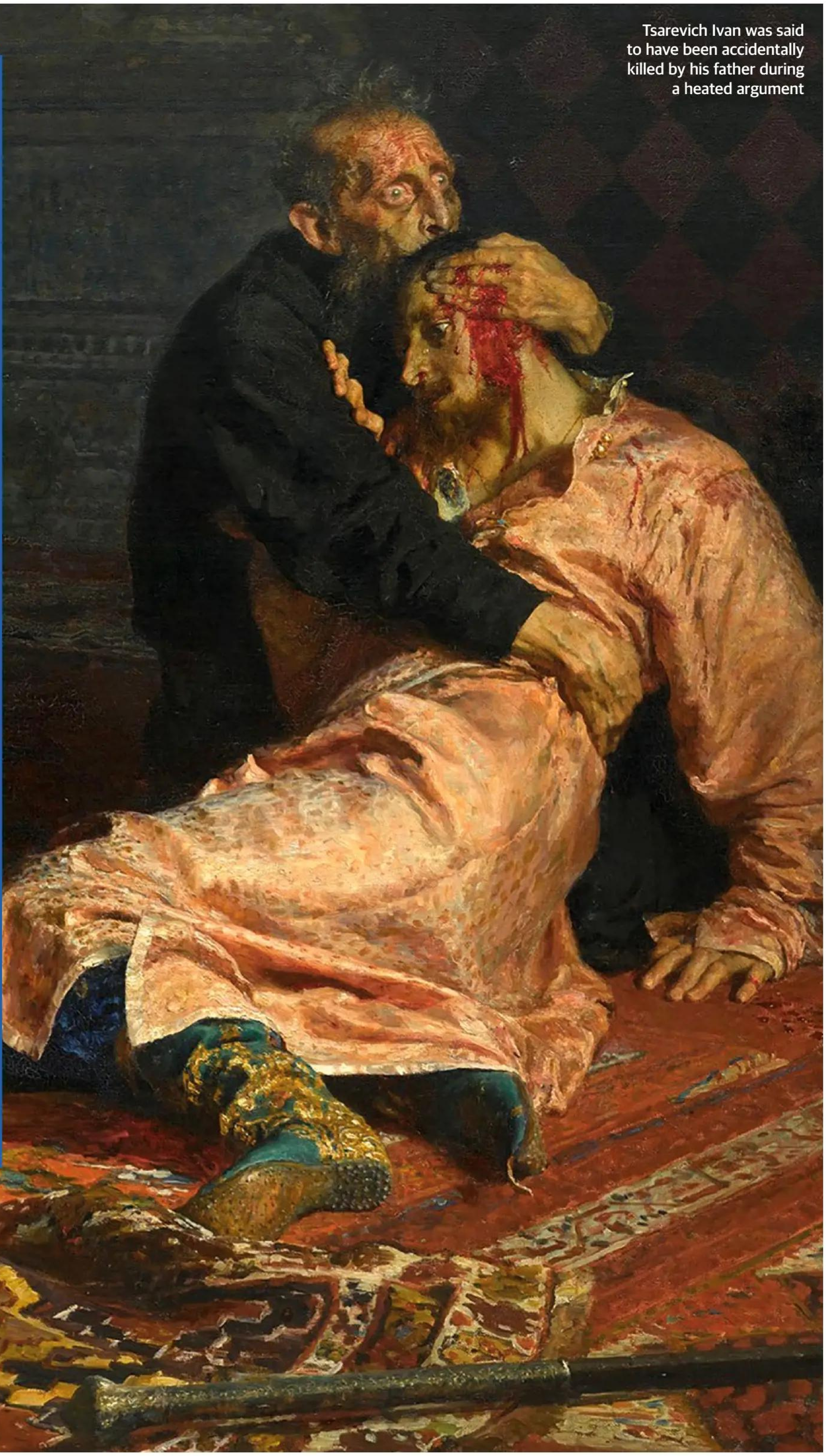
THE TARGET OF IVAN'S IRE, WHAT ROLE DID THESE ARISTOCRATS PLAY IN SOCIETY?



The highest rank of aristocracy in Bulgaria, Serbia, Wallachia, Moldavia, Romania, Livonia, and Russia, the boyars were the most powerful and richest families of the region from the 10th to 17th centuries, save only for the princes who ruled. Because of their rank and status they often formed the advisory councils around the princes, but under Ivan III and Ivan IV that began to change as they looked to unify power under their own rule and select their own captains to manage principalities instead of the local land owners.

Perhaps as a result of these changes, Russian folktales involving tsars and the boyars often paint the aristocratic families as manipulative and serving their own ends. As some of the oldest families, the boyar class were also staunch defenders of traditional Russian values, such as upholding the prohibition on shaving.

When Peter the Great returned from Europe he wanted to modernise Russian customs, and this included encouraging shaving. Outraged at the prospect, the boyars protested, but Peter introduced a beard tax to force the issue.

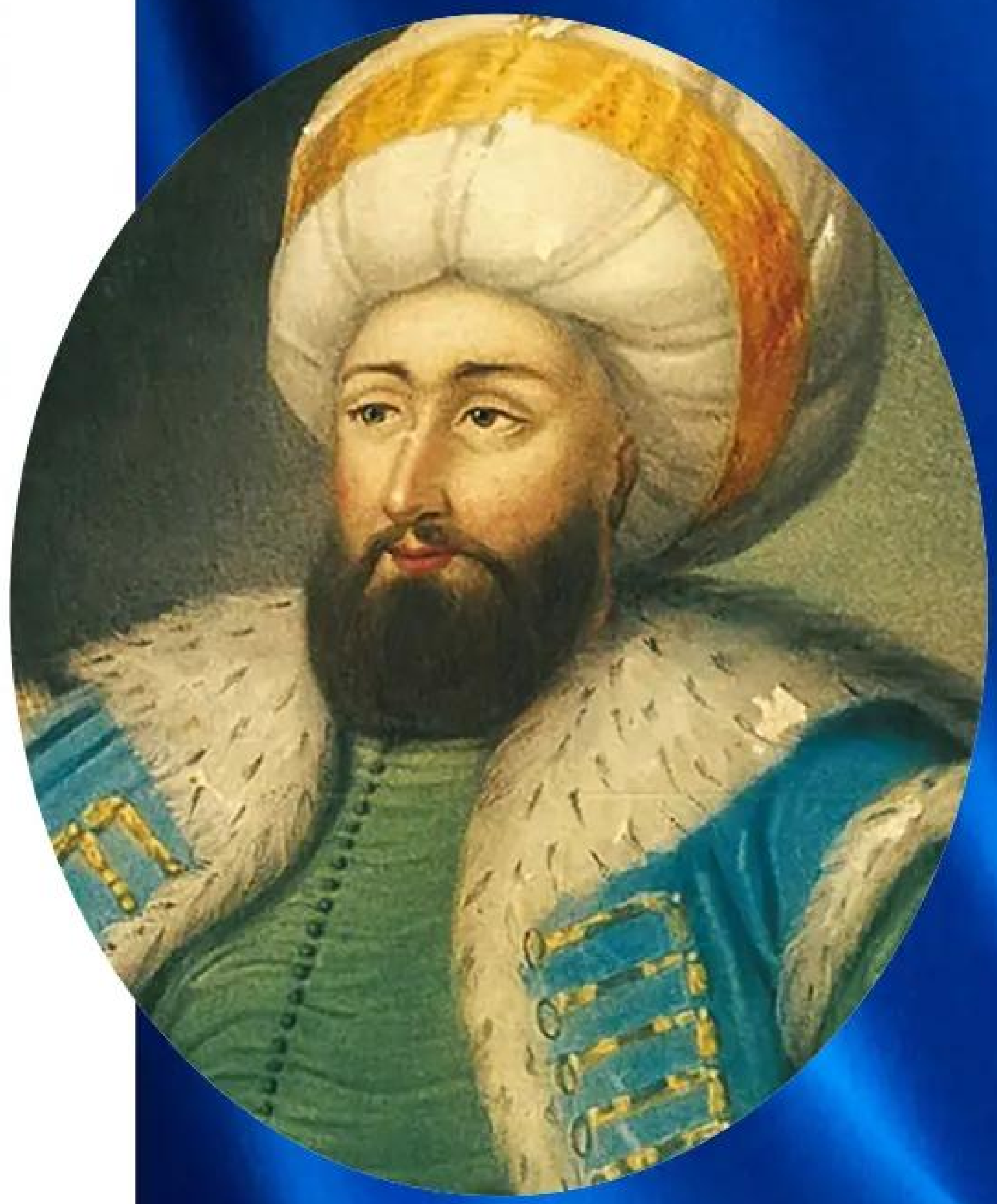


Tsarevich Ivan was said to have been accidentally killed by his father during a heated argument

Image source Getty Images, wiki/Tretyakov Gallery

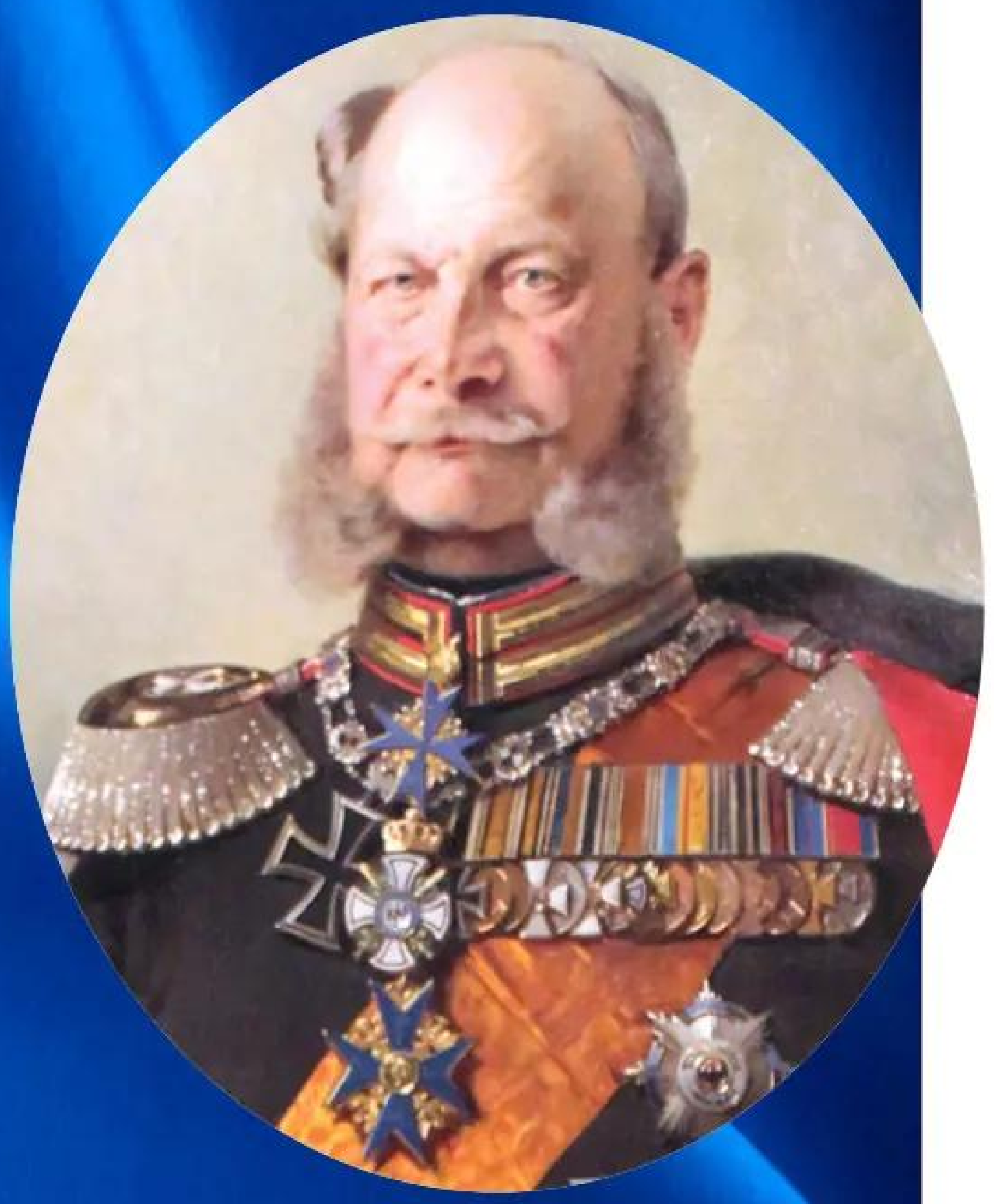
What's in a name?

EXPLORING THE POPULARITY OF THE TITLE 'CAESAR'



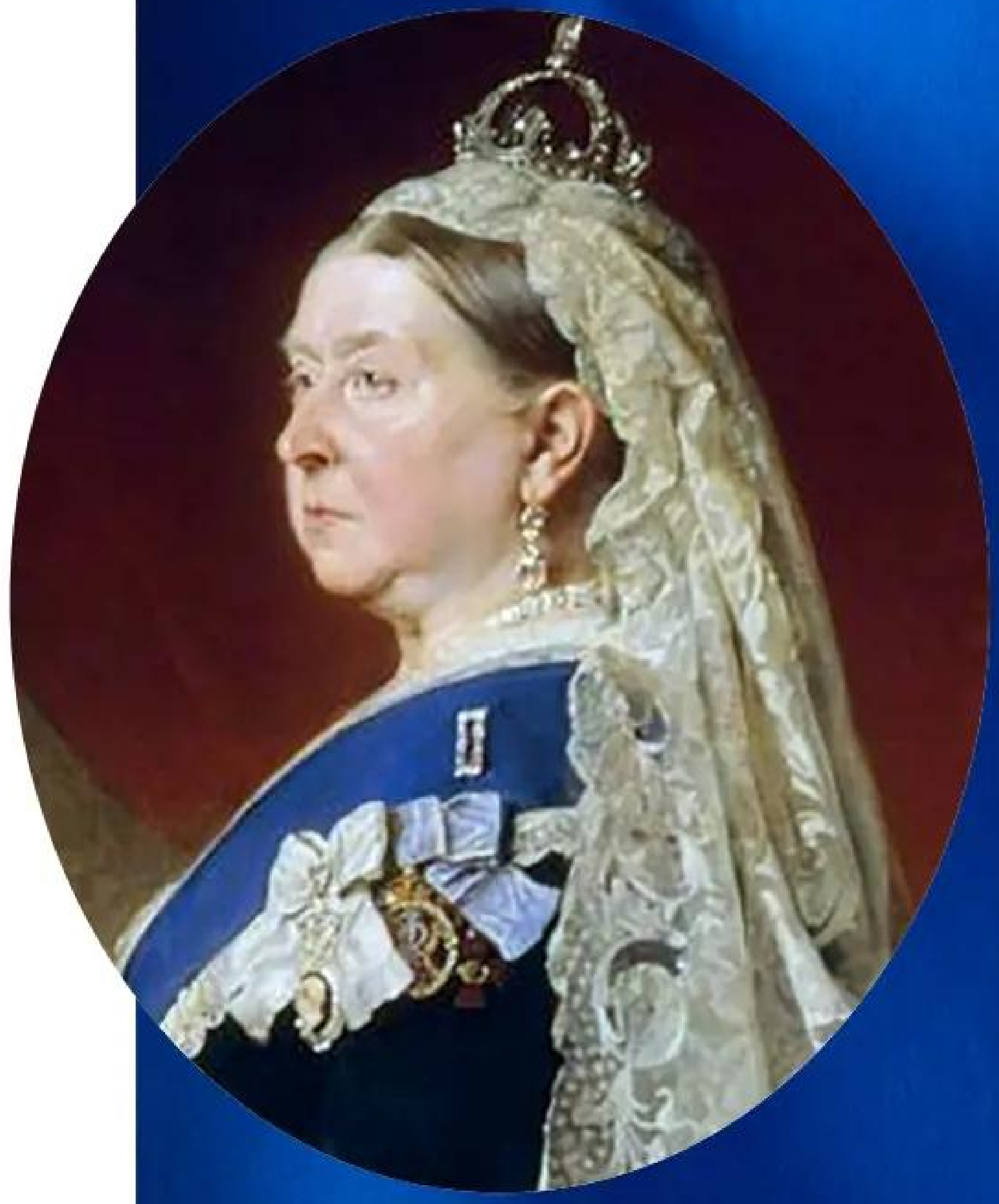
Kayser-i Rûm OTTOMAN EMPIRE

While the title of caesar had been adopted and handed down among the Roman emperors since Julius Caesar (who wasn't actually ever an emperor), any claim to the title of emperor of Rome had become tenuous after the fall of the Byzantine Empire. However, when Mehmed II captured Constantinople (the former capital of the Byzantines and the 'second Rome') he adopted the title 'Caesar of the Romans', claiming a direct line of power to that old empire.



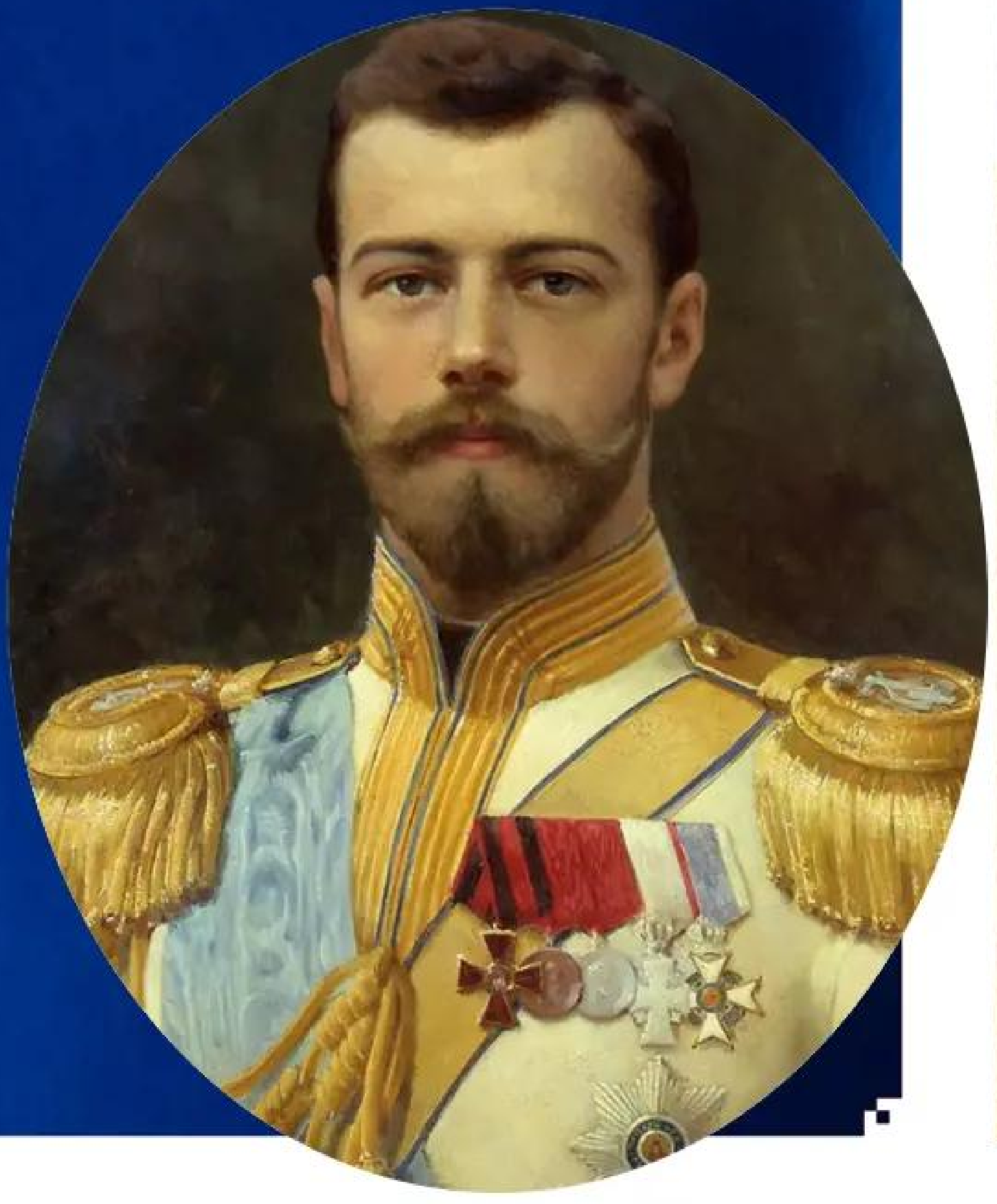
Kaiser GERMANY

Beginning with the Holy Roman emperors and adopted by the Habsburgs from 1804, the term Kaiser was used in combination with king of the Romans, as approved by the pope in Rome. The claim was that the title proved some degree of heritage and authority derived from the Roman Empire itself, although that's less clear in the Habsburgs' use of it.



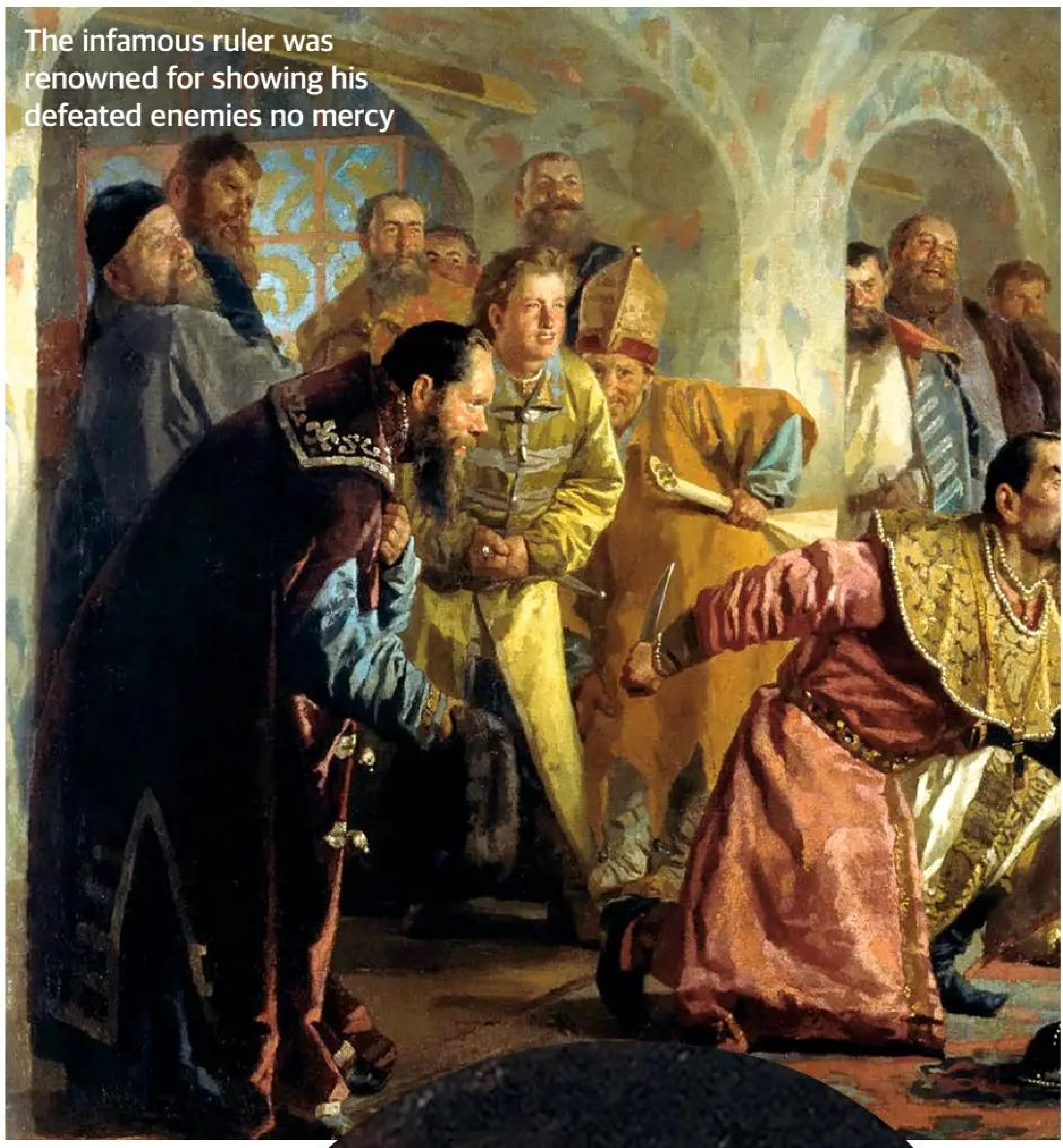
Kaisar-i-Hind BRITISH RAJ

This was the Urdu version of the title of emperor of India used by British monarchs during the British Raj, and it originated with Queen Victoria wishing to be proclaimed empress of India. The title Kaisar-i-Hind was created by G. W. Leitner, an orientalist, in 1876, but it was simply used to mean emperor rather than claiming any Roman lineage.

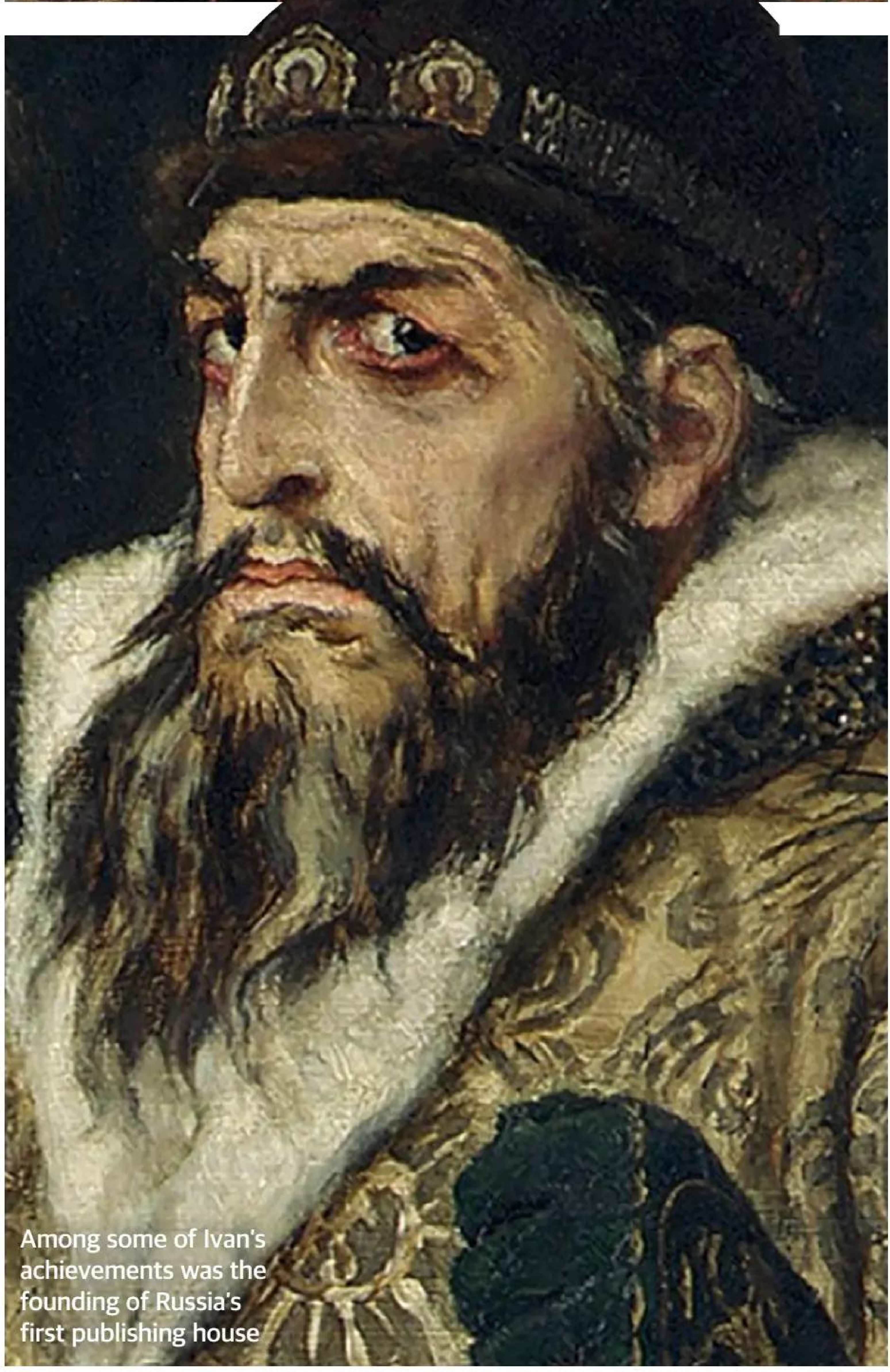


Tsar RUSSIA

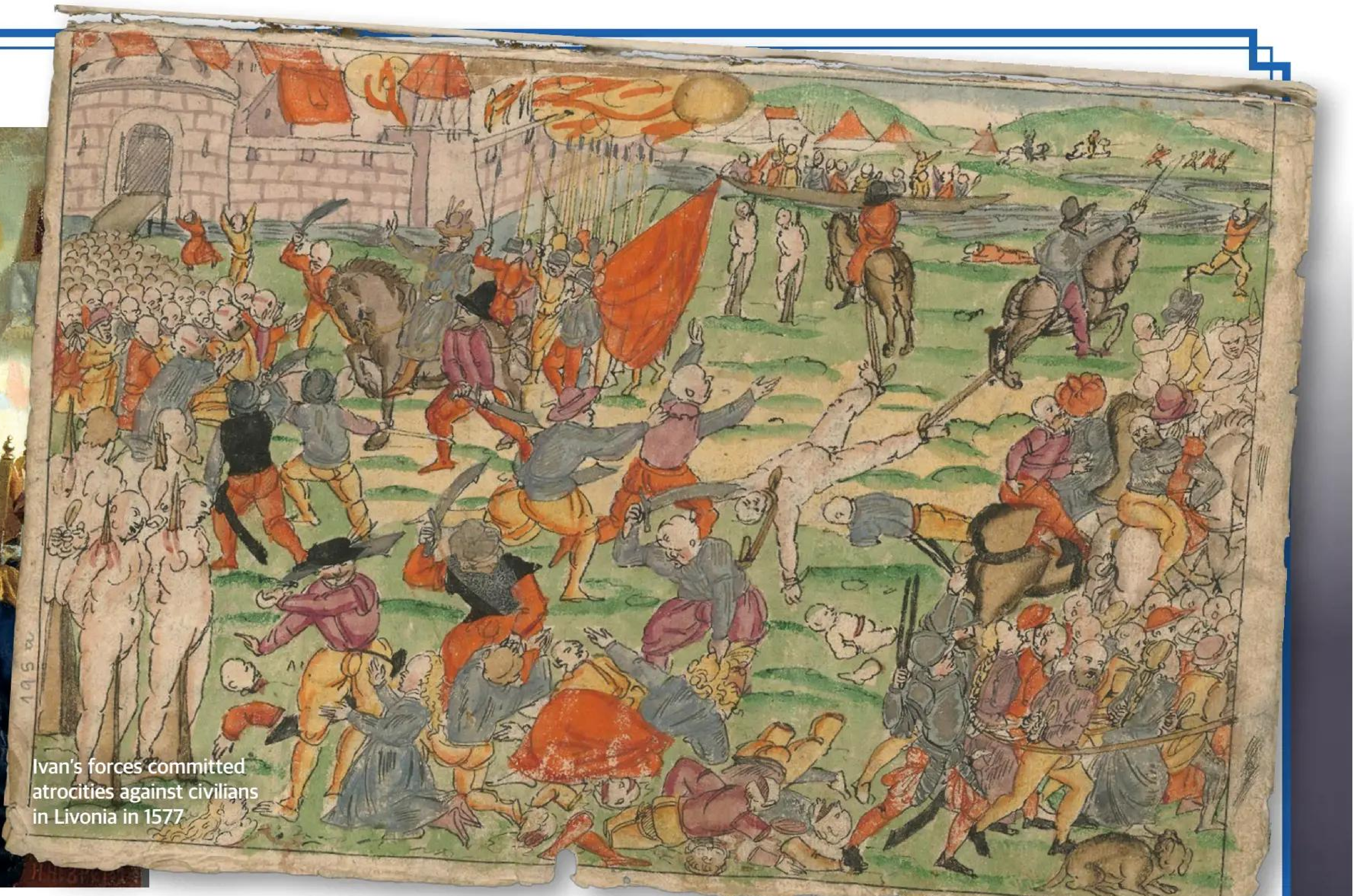
Beginning in the 15th century, a political movement emerged that wanted to claim Moscow as the 'third Rome'. With Constantinople being the second Rome as capital to the Byzantine Empire, some believed the Grand Duchy of Moscow should be the new spiritual successor to that lineage. In taking the title tsar, Ivan IV was endorsing that claim.



The infamous ruler was renowned for showing his defeated enemies no mercy



Among some of Ivan's achievements was the founding of Russia's first publishing house



Ivan's forces committed atrocities against civilians in Livonia in 1577

murder, in 1591, of Tsar Ivan's youngest son, Tsarevich Dmitry of Uglich, who was then regarded as the most likely heir to the throne. In 1604, a man claiming to be Dmitry led an invading army from neighbouring Lithuania. This 'false Dmitry' seized the Russian throne in 1605 but was overthrown the following year. The period of civil war and foreign intervention that ensued became known as the Time of Troubles. It came to an end only in 1613, when Michael Romanov, the great-nephew of Ivan's first wife, Anastasia, was elected as tsar. Michael was the founder of the new Romanov dynasty that ruled Russia until the revolution of 1917.

Tsar Michael succeeded to a realm that was largely devastated by the upheavals of the Time of Troubles. Nevertheless, the basic administrative infrastructure that had been created by Ivan's reforms in the mid-16th century provided a basis for recovery. Territorial expansion continued in Siberia, and Russians reached the Pacific Ocean in 1639. Under Michael's son, Alexis (r. 1645–76), Russia regained much of the western territory that had been lost in the later stages of the Livonian War and expanded to annex the eastern Ukrainian lands, including the city of Kiev, from Poland-Lithuania. Alexis' son Peter (the Great) continued with successful military action in the west, famously establishing a Russian presence on the Baltic coast, where he built his new capital, St Petersburg, in 1703. As a result of his victory over Sweden in the Great Northern War in 1721, Peter took the title of emperor in addition to tsar, using the Latin term imperator to stress the Russian rulers' claim of continuity with the Roman empire (St. Petersburg, like Rome, was the 'city of St. Peter').

"Over 400 years later Ivan is still seen by some as the archetype of a Russian ruler"

Peter's orientation towards the West meant that many Russian officials in the 18th and 19th centuries looked back at Ivan's Muscovy as backward and barbaric. However, some intellectual critics of the tsarist regime who wanted to see Russia become a constitutional monarchy – or even a republic – felt that the system had not changed so much since the 16th century and that Peter and his successors, such as Nicholas I (r. 1825–55) and Alexander III (r. 1881–94), were just as tyrannical and oppressive as Ivan had been. A negative image of Ivan (and of most other tsars) was also put forward by historians in the first years of Soviet power after the revolution of 1917.

A surprising change took place, however, under Joseph Stalin. During World War II, Ivan's attempts to gain access to the Baltic Sea in the Livonian War provided propagandists with a heroic precedent for Stalin's efforts to annex the Baltic states that had gained independence from the Russian Empire after the revolutions of 1917. But the Soviet leader also favoured a positive image of the oprichnina, as a 'progressive' force dedicated to the eradication of treason. Stalin held a highly favourable view of Ivan: his only criticism was that the tsar was not sufficiently ruthless in his persecution of the boyars and wasted too much time repenting and praying for the forgiveness of his sins. Stalin clearly saw Ivan as a role model but was determined that he himself would not make the mistake of being too soft on traitors.

After Stalin's death in 1953, Soviet attitudes towards Ivan became more negative, and Stalin himself was criticised for having turned the 'terrible tsar' into a Russian national hero. Partly because of his self-identification with Ivan, Stalin has been described as a 'red tsar', and the term tsar has also been used – in a negative sense – for subsequent Russian leaders, such as Vladimir Putin, by their critics, who regard them as autocratic.

More than 400 years after Ivan was crowned as the first tsar, he is still seen by some as the archetype of a Russian ruler, although none of his successors (apart from Stalin) went as far as he did in using mass terror as a political weapon. It is surely somewhat ironic that the title of tsar, which evoked so many connotations of the glory of imperial Rome at the time of Ivan's coronation, should have ended up implying a tyrant.

Image source: Getty Images, wiki/Konstantin Kapidagli, wiki/Deutsches Historisches Museum Berlin, wiki/The Royal Collection, wiki/Ilya Savich Galkin

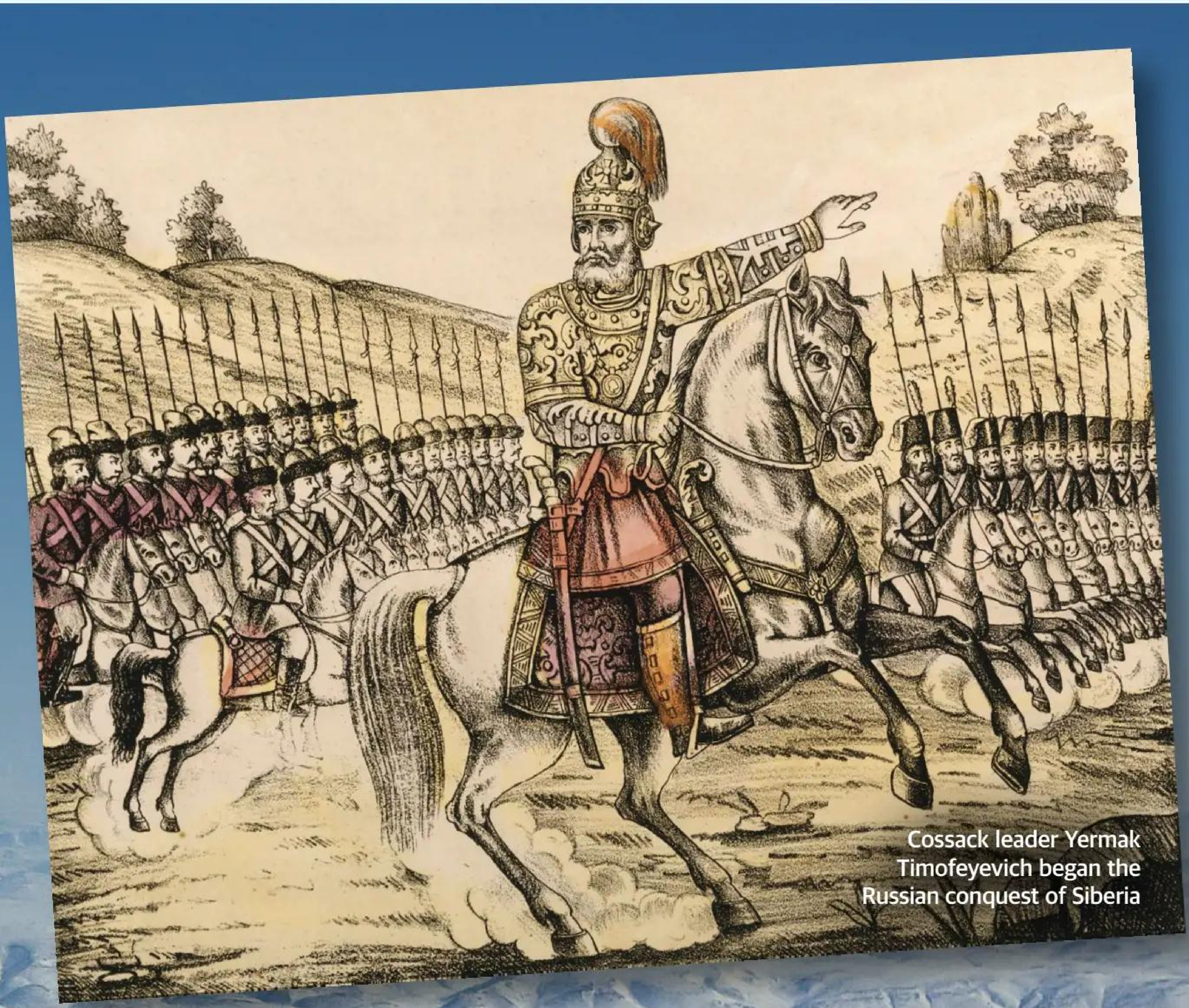
The conquest of Siberia

DRIVEN BY THE HUNGER FOR NEW TERRITORY, IN THE 16TH CENTURY RUSSIA EMBARKED ON THE RUTHLESS SUBJUGATION OF A VAST AND HOSTILE LAND IN THE FROZEN EAST

Written by Wayne Bartlett

Siberia offered vast opportunities to the tsars. It was rich in valuable natural resources, but at the time this was not the oil for which it would later become important but furs, such as sable, black fox, and beaver. This was a lucrative in the mid-1500s, but obtaining access to it would not be easy. The enormous extent of the territory involved meant that there were many challenges to overcome. Siberia was a fragmented region peopled by various competing tribes who had a reputation (largely deserved) for ferocity. They would not take kindly to interlopers from the west seeking to extract tribute from them.

The first steps at trying to pry away the natives' wealth were made by adventurers who were prepared to gamble a great deal (including their lives) in the search for profit. The formidable Tsar Ivan IV (widely known as 'the Terrible') gave permission to a prominent noble family, the Stroganovs, to exploit Siberia's potential, essentially as his surrogate. In 1555, the rulers of Sibir (just east of the Ural Mountains) agreed to pay tribute to the tsar. However, this was only a temporary state of


Cossack leader Yermak Timofeyevich began the Russian conquest of Siberia

The harshness of Siberia is typified by this scene of Chukotka

The Khanate of Sibir

A view of the Irtysh River, which ran through the heart of the Khanate of Sibir

It is worth noting that although Sibir gave its name to Siberia, the two should not be confused. The Khanate of Sibir was just one part of a much larger territory that we now know as Siberia.

The Khanate of Sibir had a long and chequered history by the time that the Cossacks headed up Russian incursions into its territory in the late 16th century. A few centuries before, it had been overwhelmed when the Mongols pushed into the region, and between 1242 and 1502 it formed part of the extensive territories ruled by the Golden Horde.

But Mongol power slowly declined, and by the 15th century the Khanate of Sibir, centred around the Irtysh River, had come into being with its first khan, Taibuga, after whom a dynasty, the Taibugids, was formed. Their rule was not uncontested, particularly by the Shaybanids, descendants of the Mongol khan Jochi. But in 1563 Kuchum became khan. Among his policies was a determined attempt to convert the shamanist Tatars of Siberia to Islam. However, his attacks on Stroganov trading posts led to dramatic and ultimately fatal consequences for his people. Tired of Kuchum's continued raids, Ivan IV unleashed the Cossacks on Sibir, a brutal force that would overwhelm the khanate.

The dangers of exploration are apparent from this portrayal of Bering's ships being wrecked

affairs. By 1563, there was a new khan in place named Kuchum, who had risen to prominence in the region after wresting power from a rival. He made clear that no future tribute would be forthcoming. This was a gradual process, but when in 1573 the tsar's ambassador to the khan was killed on arrival at his court, it was clear that a moment of truth had been reached.

During the 1580s, one of the most formidable of the adventurers who opened up Siberia for Russia entered the scene. This was Vasiliy Timofeyevich, better known as Yermak. He led a band of Cossacks, a tough group of warriors; outstanding horsemen, hard to control, brave and cruel. Emanating from both Russia and Ukraine, they were a fearsome proposition for anyone unfortunate enough to be in their way. At the time fiercely independent, the Cossacks would be brought into the Russian orbit in 1654 by the Pereyaslav Agreement, under the terms of which the leader of the Ukrainian Cossacks ceded Ukraine to Russia. This was controversial at the time, leading to war between Russia and Poland, and to some extent its impact extends to the present day. It was precipitated by Cossack defeats at the hands of Polish forces, leading to the Cossack leader Bohdan Khmelnytsky, a Ruthenian nobleman, entering into the agreement with Russia.

When Cossack forces moved into Siberia in the early 1580s, they were supplemented by others including troops from the Stroganovs as well as conscripted prisoners. Crossing the Urals into Siberia during the winter, Yermak and his men then rested up. When the snows began to melt in the following spring they moved forward by river, using rafts for the purpose. Cunning played its part too. They put dummies made of straw on the rafts to give the impression that their numbers were greater than they actually were. But what Yermak lacked in numbers he made up for in other ways. His men had firearms whereas Kuchum's army relied primarily on bows and arrows.

The Cossacks moved on Iskar, Kuchum's capital. In October, (probably in 1582 – the precise year is uncertain) they launched their

> *"They were a fearsome proposition for anyone unfortunate enough to be in their way"*

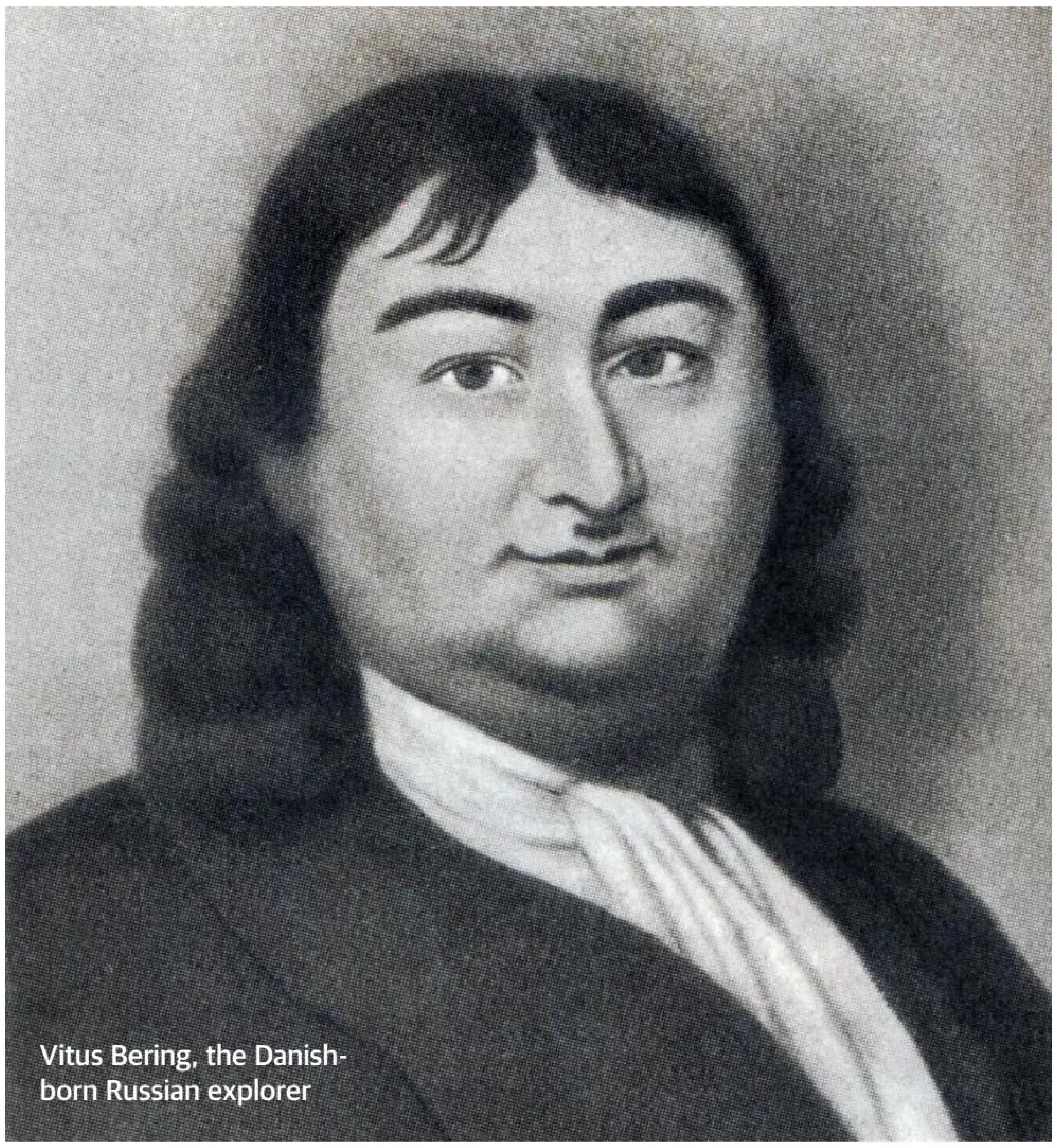
attack. Their first assault was beaten off but they returned a few days after. On 23 October, they broke into the town and ferocious hand-to-hand fighting ensued. Although the defenders had two cannons, the rest of their weapons were inferior to those of the Cossacks. A devout Muslim, Kuchum ordered his mullahs to pray for divine assistance, but his cannons were taken and it became apparent to him that the fight was lost. Some of his men deserted him "and fled on horseback to their homeland without return, to lie there like animals in wild forests". Seeing that Iskar would fall, he fled, and the Khanate of Sibir that he ruled came to an effective end (though it did make a brief reappearance a few years later).

Cossack losses were heavy though, and reinforcements were needed. Yermak therefore sent news of his triumph to Ivan IV in Moscow along with a selection of furs as tribute – including 2,400 sable, 800 black fox and 2,000 beaver pelts – and a request for help. Ivan for his part was pleased to add the title 'tsar of Siberia' to the others he already bore. However, it would be a long, hard process to complete the conquest and Yermak would not see it concluded. In August 1585, he was attacked in his camp by a group of Kuchum's men. He is said to have drowned in a nearby river while trying to escape dressed in full armour.

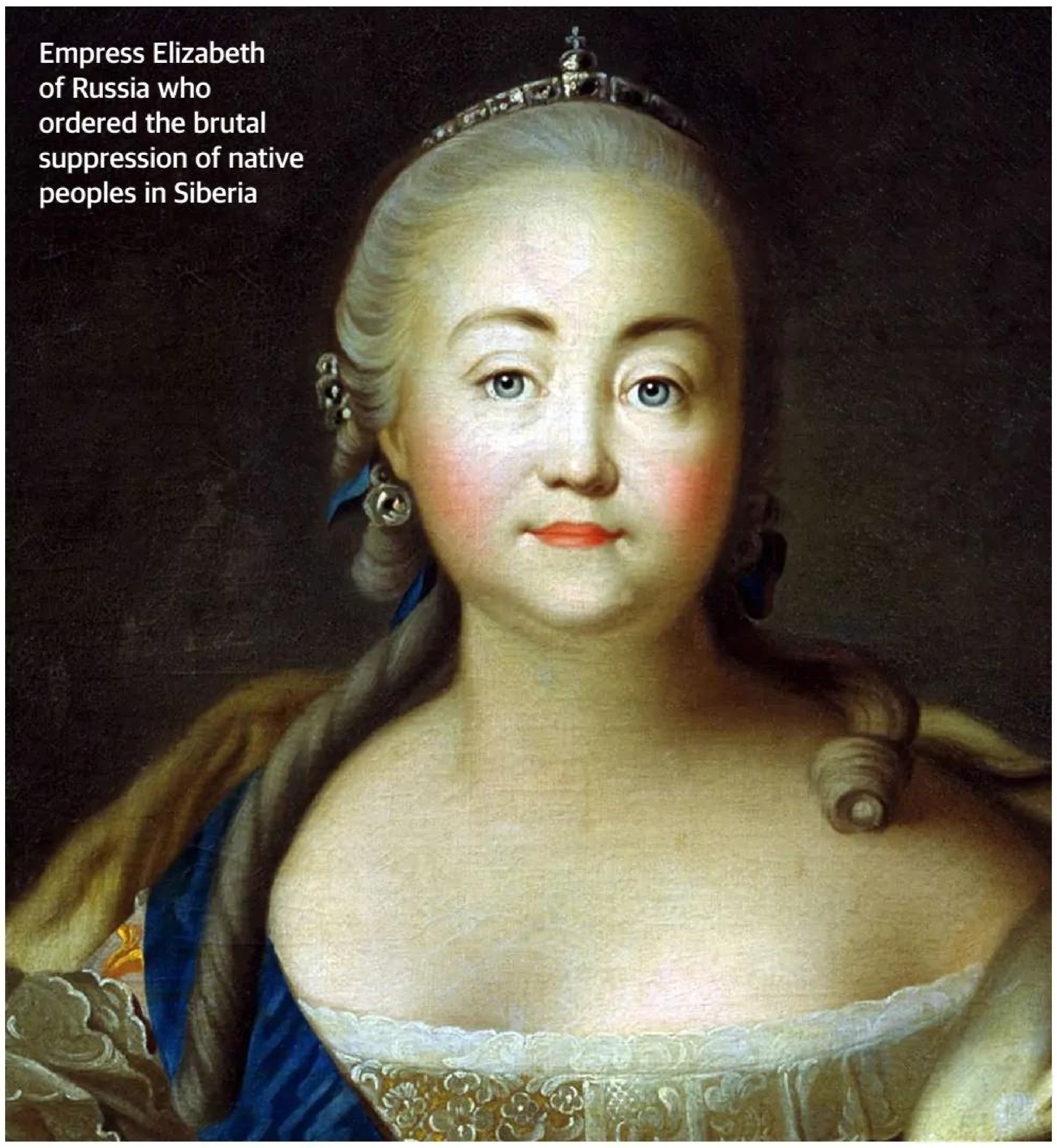
Kuchum remained a free man for some time, though he was forced to lead a nomadic existence in later years. He retreated to the territories of the Nogai Horde in southern Siberia. Kuchum reached out to Tsar Ivan to ask that he be granted a small territory on the banks of the Irtysh River. Ivan invited him to Moscow, encouraging him into his service. Kuchum opted not to go, which given Ivan's reputation was probably wise. Kuchum, whose family had been captured, ended his life in Bukhara, an old man and now blind, in around 1605.

These were preliminary moves in the conquest of Siberia. However, they opened up opportunities for others to follow up on. Trappers and fur traders started to probe further into the region to take advantage of the rich natural resources to be found. But they needed protection. A series of winter outposts and forts were built at the confluences of major rivers and streams and important portages to subjugate the natives and collect yasuk (fur tribute). These developed into towns such as Tyumen (established by Vasily Sukin and Ivan Myasnoy in 1586).

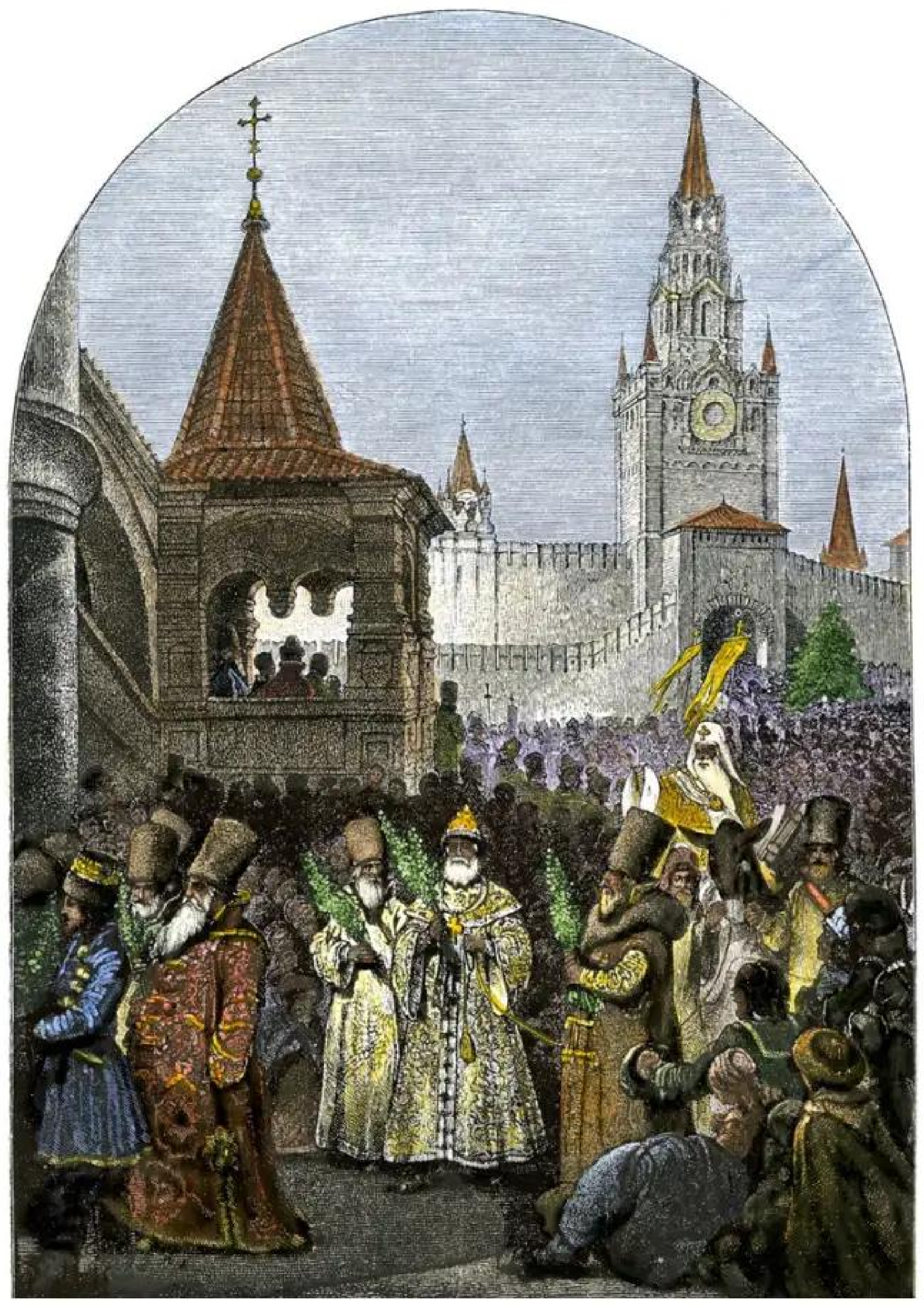
Other important posts were established in the north such as at Beryozo in 1593 and Mangazeya (1600–01). Tobolsk (the second-oldest Russian settlement east of the Urals) became particularly important. Part of the process of conquest and domination involved bringing different tribal groups, such as the Nenets, progressively under the heel of Russia. The extent of control grew further as towns were established, such as Surgut and Tara



Vitus Bering, the Danish-born Russian explorer



Empress Elizabeth of Russia who ordered the brutal suppression of native peoples in Siberia



A religious procession through Moscow in the time of Tsar Ivan IV

"Siberian resistance was evaporating, but the Russians had advanced so far to the east that a new challenge had emerged in the shape of China"

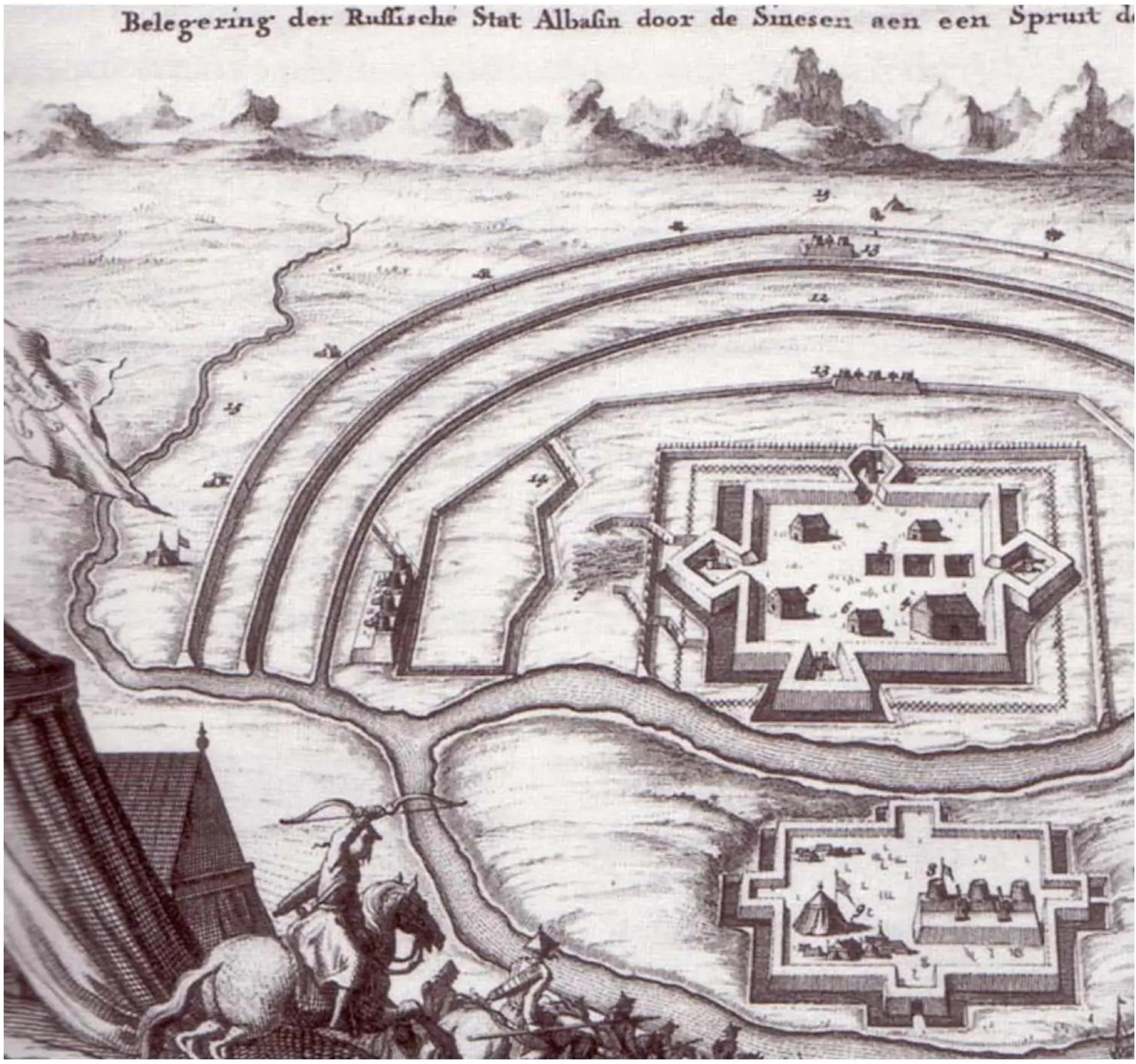
in the east. These collectively served several purposes. They were places of security but also of administration and trade. They also enabled a tighter grip to be gradually established over the increasingly vast areas that Russia claimed to rule.

Rivers played a key part in opening up Siberia further. In the early years of the 17th century, Russians pushed further up the Ob, and by 1605 they were on the Yenesei, transiting it to the Sym. As the Russian incursion spread, what were initially separate pushes eastwards joined up, further strengthening control over the region. Then it was on to Lake Baikal and the Sea of Okhotsk before finally the Amur River was reached.

Here the situation changed. Siberian resistance was evaporating, but the Russians had advanced so far to the east that a new challenge had emerged in the shape of China. This introduced a completely different element into the equation. The Chinese were equipped with powerful artillery and militarily they posed a strong obstacle to further expansion. Tensions were virtually inevitable, and at the Battle of Hutong, which was fought between a fleet of newly constructed Chinese ships (supported by Korean forces) and Cossacks who had taken up a defensive position on the Songhua River, the Chinese forces of the Qing dynasty scored a significant victory.

In June 1686, a Qing army led by Langtan laid siege to the Russian settlement of Albazin on the border between the two power blocs. An initial assault following a heavy artillery bombardment was beaten off by the Russians and the Qing incurred significant losses. What followed was not that different than a medieval siege. A total blockade around the city was put in place and tightly implemented. Sickness, a greater enemy sometimes than the soldiers of the armies they were fighting against, took hold. In October 1686, envoys from Moscow arrived in Beijing, and three years later, under the terms of the Treaty of Nerchinsk, the Russians abandoned Albazin in return for trading privileges with the Beijing government. When, as a sign of good intent, the Qing army called off the siege of Albazin in late 1686, only 24 of the original 500 Russian defenders were left alive.

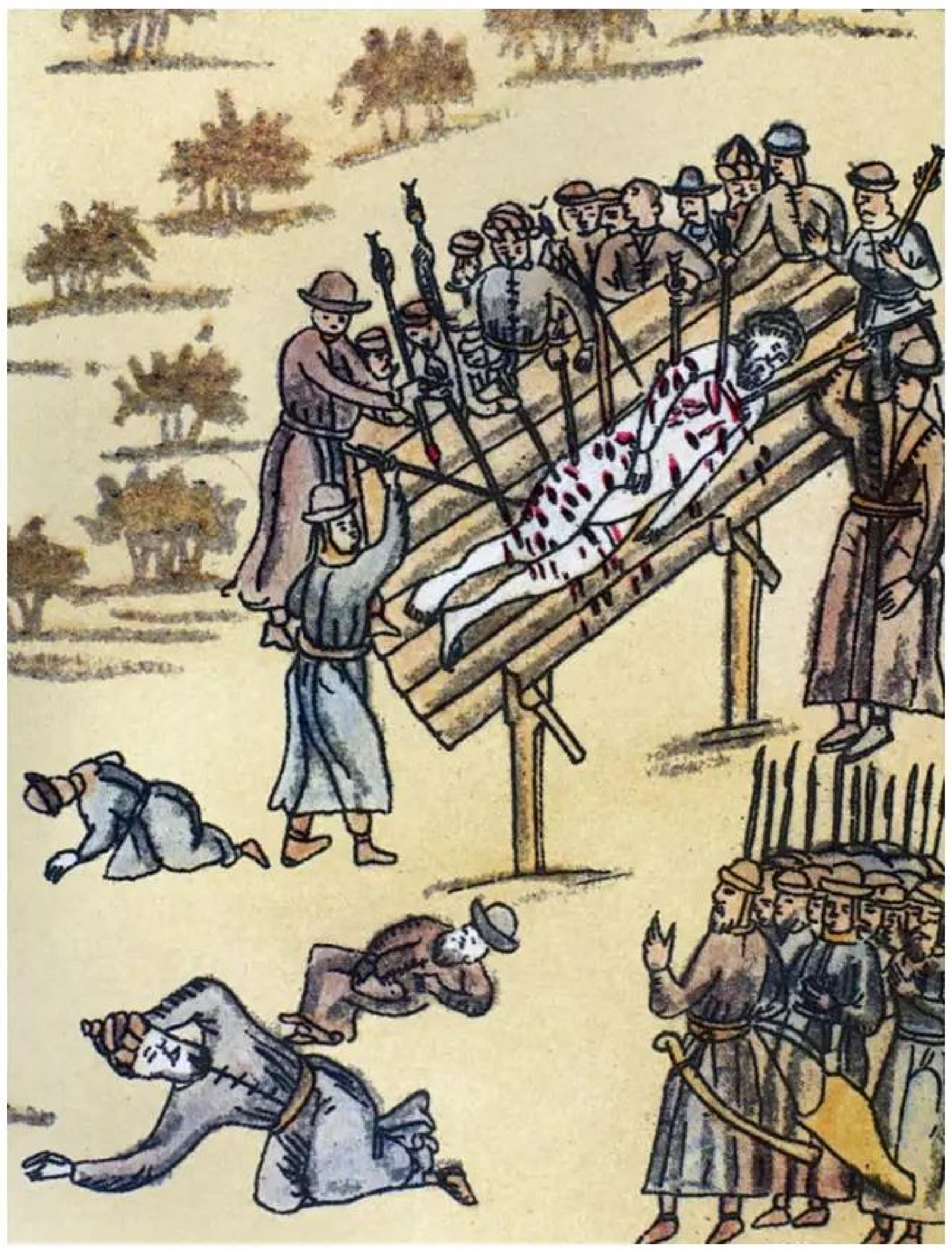
Effectively the Treaty of Nerchinsk called a formal halt to attempts at further Russian expansion in the Amur region, but this did not stop them from expanding in other directions. In 1639, they had reached the Pacific, a hugely significant development. Nine years later, Semen Dezhnev reached what later became the Bering Straits. This enabled Alaska to be reached via some simple island-hopping, though this did not happen until 1761. What opened up the region more was the so-called Great Northern Expedition between 1733 and 1743, which enhanced the Russians' understanding of it immensely. There were a number of academics and scientists involved in the expedition, which was led by Danish-born


Belegering der Russische Stat Albasin door de Sinesen aen een Spruit

The Ural Mountains, the frontier between Russia and Siberia

er Riviere Amur gelegen.

The fortress of Albazin in the Amur region, site of an epic clash between Russia and the Qing dynasty



The corpse of the Cossack leader Yermak is mutilated by his enemies

Russian commander Vitus Bering. However, the results of the expedition went beyond scientific research. Gradually, the Russians gained a better understanding of this vast region and its natural resources (including a greater awareness of nearby Alaska as well as Siberia), with major consequences for the region.

The Russians, in particular the Cossack forces, brought with them incredible hardship. Their actions were often violently oppressive. Three tribal groups, the Kamchadals, the Kuryaks, and the Chukchi, were particularly harshly persecuted in an extended period that stretched from the mid-17th to the mid-18th centuries (though to be clear many other tribal groupings were badly affected too). Dissentient men from these tribes were hanged from meat hooks. Other terrors indirectly brought on the native population included diseases such as smallpox that the local population had no natural immunity to. In some cases, native populations declined by up to 80 per cent. In an attack initiated by the Russian Empress Elizabeth that lasted from 1744 to 1747, native men were killed and women and children were enslaved. This was done by Cossacks "with the help of Almighty God and to the good future of Her Imperial Highness". Not for the first time in history, religion was being deployed as justification for brutal repression. In 1778, Russia made a peace agreement with Chukotka, at the extreme north-easterly tip of Siberia (and indeed mainland Asia). This brought this phase of Russian expansion to a natural end.

The long-term results of this expansion were devastating. In Kamchatka, in the very far east of Siberia, today only about 5 per cent of the population is now of indigenous origin. In 1882, Nikolai Yadrintsev identified 12 native groups that had been exterminated because of Russian expansion. Nature also suffered greatly, with local animal populations decimated in the hunt for fur. The shape of Siberia had been altered forever, but it had come at an unbearable cost to many of those who were unavoidably caught up in these momentous events.

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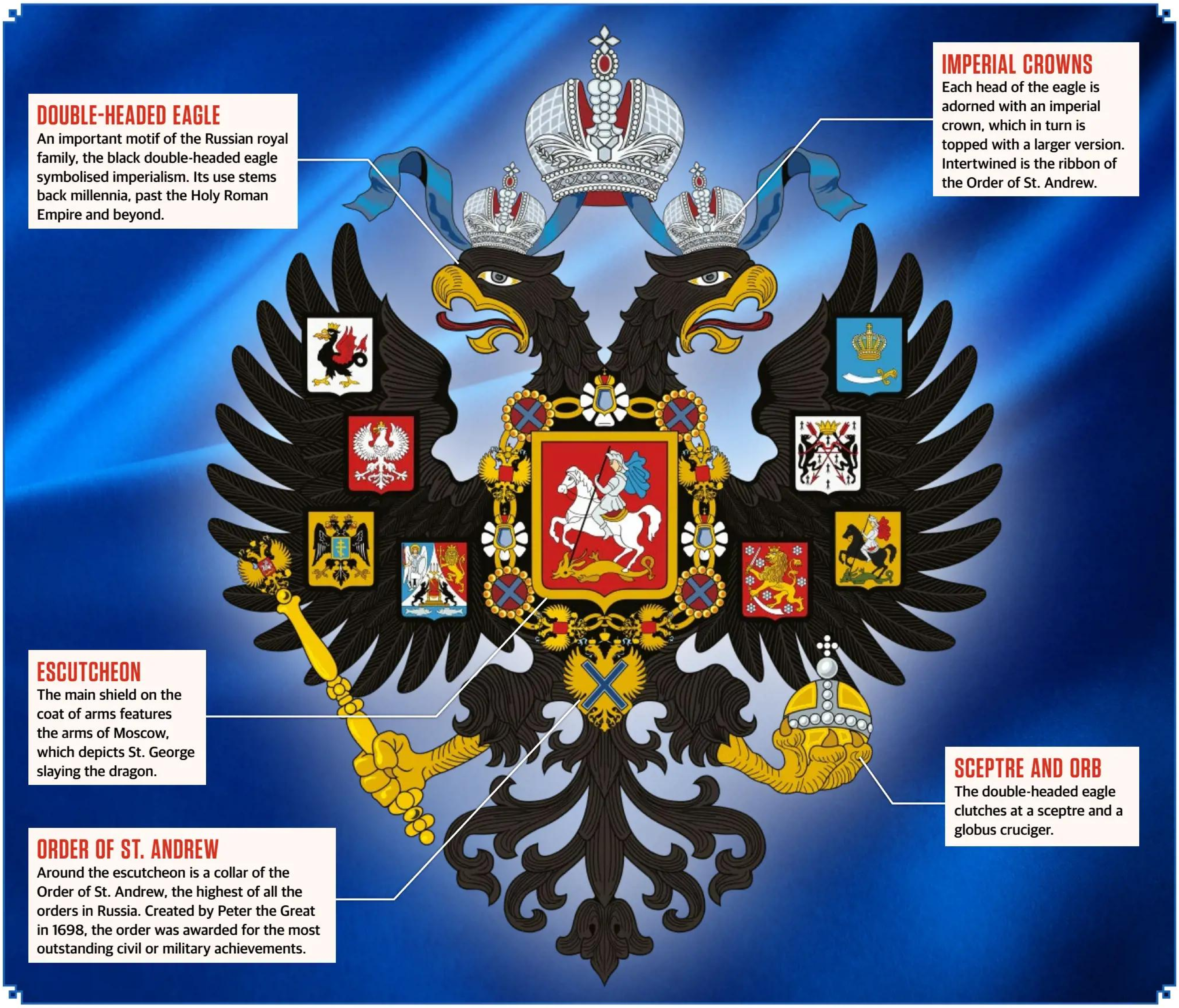
Rule of the Romanovs

1613-1917

CHARACTERISED BY INTRIGUE, AMBITION, TREACHERY, AND REVOLUTION, THE ROMANOV DYNASTY REIGNED FOR OVER 300 YEARS – WITH VERY MIXED RESULTS. PREPARE TO MEET SOME OF ITS MOST FASCINATING FIGURES…



DOUBLE-HEADED EAGLE
An important motif of the Russian royal family, the black double-headed eagle symbolised imperialism. Its use stems back millennia, past the Holy Roman Empire and beyond.

IMPERIAL CROWNS
Each head of the eagle is adorned with an imperial crown, which in turn is topped with a larger version. Intertwined is the ribbon of the Order of St. Andrew.

ESCUTCHEON
The main shield on the coat of arms features the arms of Moscow, which depicts St. George slaying the dragon.

SCEPTRE AND ORB
The double-headed eagle clutches at a sceptre and a globus cruciger.

ORDER OF ST. ANDREW
Around the escutcheon is a collar of the Order of St. Andrew, the highest of all the orders in Russia. Created by Peter the Great in 1698, the order was awarded for the most outstanding civil or military achievements.

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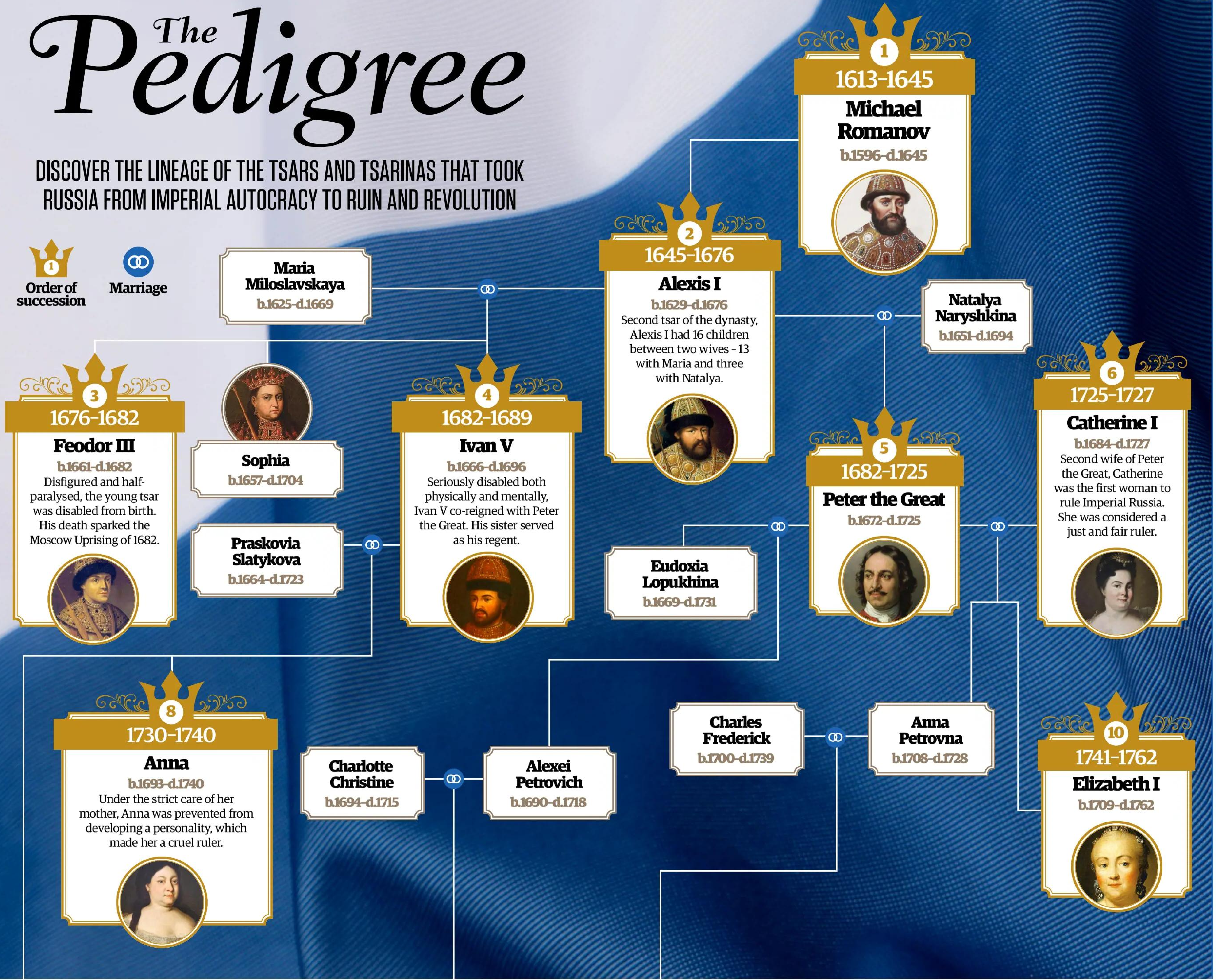
The Pedigree

DISCOVER THE LINEAGE OF THE TSARS AND TSARINAS THAT TOOK RUSSIA FROM IMPERIAL AUTOCRACY TO RUIN AND REVOLUTION



1
1613-1645
Michael Romanov
b.1596-d.1645

2
1645-1676
Alexis I
b.1629-d.1676
Second tsar of the dynasty, Alexis I had 16 children between two wives - 13 with Maria and three with Natalya.

Maria Miloslavskaya
b.1625-d.1669

Natalya Naryshkina
b.1651-d.1694

3
1676-1682
Feodor III
b.1661-d.1682
Disfigured and half-paralysed, the young tsar was disabled from birth. His death sparked the Moscow Uprising of 1682.

Sophia
b.1657-d.1704

4
1682-1689
Ivan V
b.1666-d.1696
Seriously disabled both physically and mentally, Ivan V co-reigned with Peter the Great. His sister served as his regent.

Praskovia Slatykova
b.1664-d.1723

5
1682-1725
Peter the Great
b.1672-d.1725

Eudoxia Lopukhina
b.1669-d.1731

6
1725-1727
Catherine I
b.1684-d.1727
Second wife of Peter the Great, Catherine was the first woman to rule Imperial Russia. She was considered a just and fair ruler.

8
1730-1740
Anna
b.1693-d.1740
Under the strict care of her mother, Anna was prevented from developing a personality, which made her a cruel ruler.

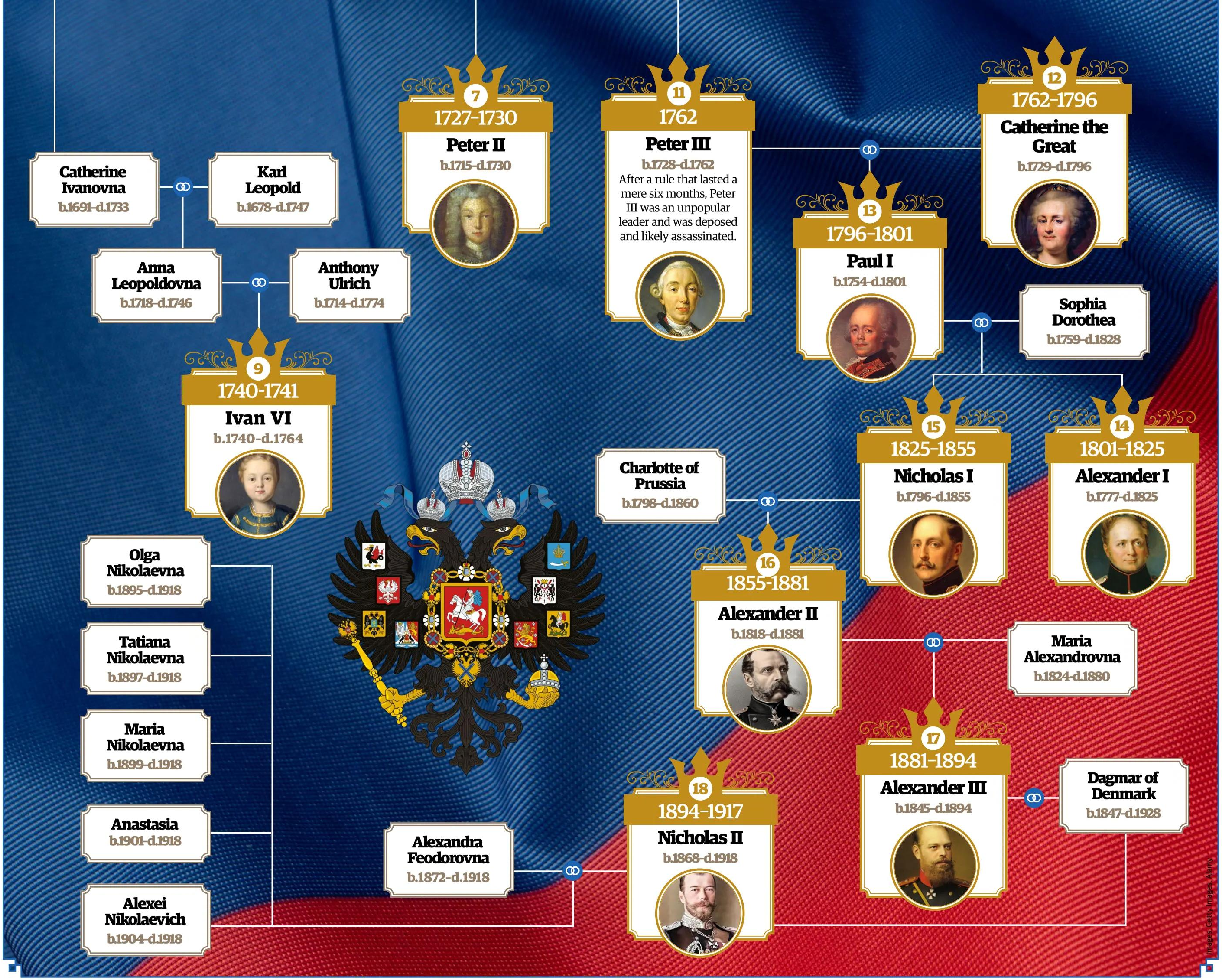
Charlotte Christine
b.1694-d.1715

Alexei Petrovich
b.1690-d.1718

Charles Frederick
b.1700-d.1739

Anna Petrovna
b.1708-d.1728

10
1741-1762
Elizabeth I
b.1709-d.1762



Catherine Ivanovna
b.1691-d.1733

Karl Leopold
b.1678-d.1747

Anna Leopoldovna
b.1718-d.1746

Anthony Ulrich
b.1714-d.1774

9
1740-1741
Ivan VI
b.1740-d.1764

7
1727-1730
Peter II
b.1715-d.1730

11
1762
Peter III
b.1728-d.1762
After a rule that lasted a mere six months, Peter III was an unpopular leader and was deposed and likely assassinated.

12
1762-1796
Catherine the Great
b.1729-d.1796

13
1796-1801
Paul I
b.1754-d.1801

Sophia Dorothea
b.1759-d.1828

15
1825-1855
Nicholas I
b.1796-d.1855

14
1801-1825
Alexander I
b.1777-d.1825

Charlotte of Prussia
b.1798-d.1860

16
1855-1881
Alexander II
b.1818-d.1881

Maria Alexandrovna
b.1824-d.1880

17
1881-1894
Alexander III
b.1845-d.1894

Dagmar of Denmark
b.1847-d.1928

18
1894-1917
Nicholas II
b.1868-d.1918

Alexandra Feodorovna
b.1872-d.1918

Olga Nikolaevna
b.1895-d.1918

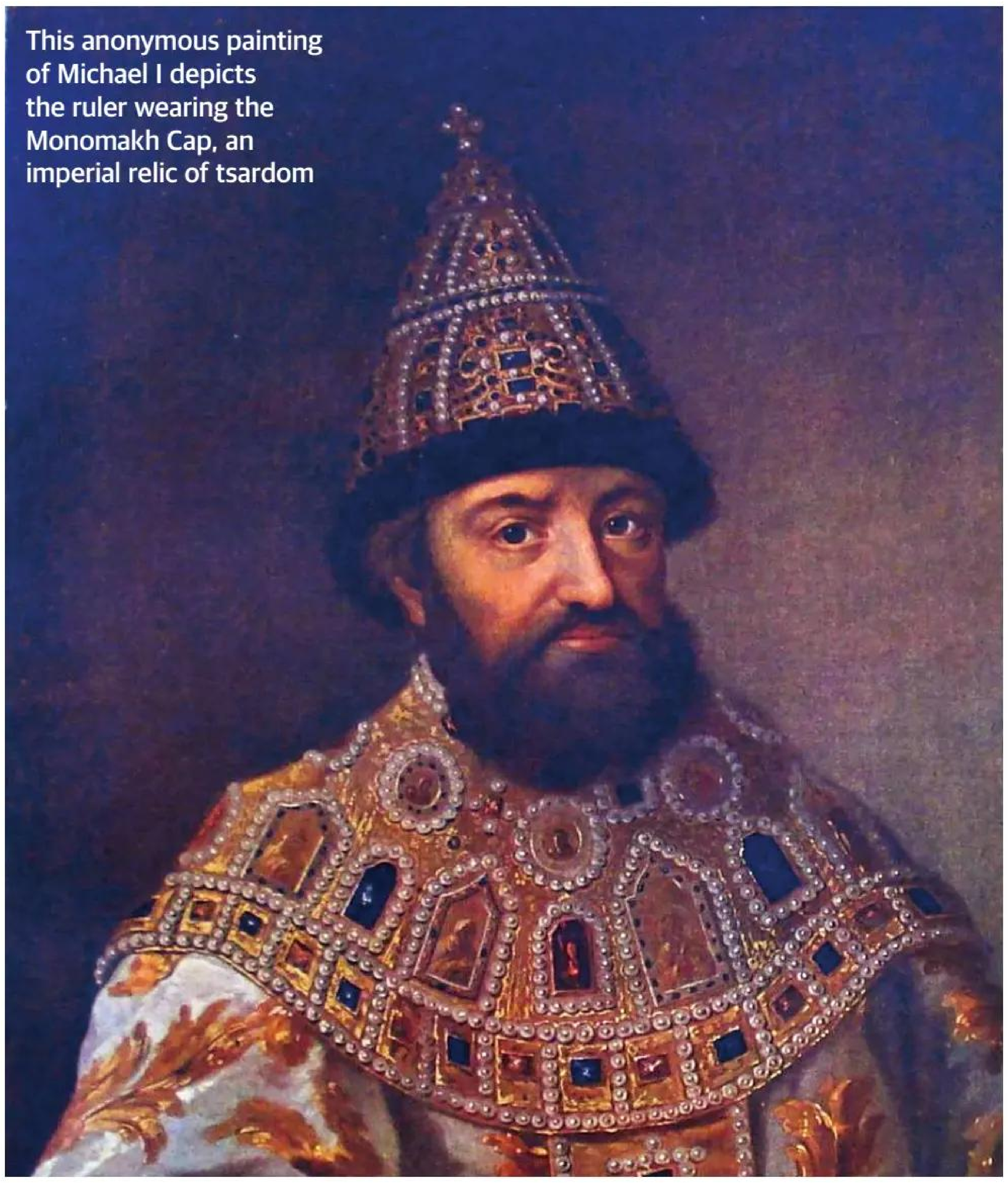
Tatiana Nikolaevna
b.1897-d.1918

Maria Nikolaevna
b.1899-d.1918

Anastasia
b.1901-d.1918

Alexei Nikolaevich
b.1904-d.1918

Images: Getty Images, Alamy



This anonymous painting of Michael I depicts the ruler wearing the Monomakh Cap, an imperial relic of tsardom

Michael I b.1596–d.1645 ♛ 1613–1645

Michael Fyodorovich Romanov was a boy when he came to the throne in 1613. Since the death of the last tsar of the Rurik dynasty, Feodor Ivanovich, in 1598, Russia had stumbled into a dark era that came to be known as the Time of Troubles.

A widespread famine added to the already tempestuous political climate, and various men (such as Boris Godunov, the False Dmitry, Vasily Shuisky) vied for power. Assassinations and massacres ensued, plus foreign invasions and internal uprisings, such as the Bolotnikov Rebellion of 1606–07, made this time all the more treacherous.

Out of this terrible phase, the Romanovs - a family related to the Rurik tsar Ivan the Terrible's first wife - were judged in a national assembly to be the best fit to rule the country. From this family, the gentle, self-effacing 16-year-old Michael Romanov was elected. His father was Patriarch Philaret (previously Fyodor Nikitich Romanov) and his mother was Xenia Shestova, who was a member of the Saltykov family. Despite his mother's very natural and rational concerns about the probably dangerous position this now put her son in, the new ruler was crowned Michael I, tsar of all Russia, on 21 July 1613, in the Cathedral of the Assumption in the Kremlin, Moscow. With the need to secure the new Romanov dynasty, the new tsar was strongly encouraged to marry and so beget the necessary heir - and he ended up marrying twice. In late 1624, Michael wed Princess Maria Vladimirovna Dolgorukova; unfortunately, this marriage lasted only four months due to Maria's sudden death. Not long after, Michael married Eudoxia Streshnyova, and this marriage proved a much greater success. Eudoxia bore him ten children, including the future Tsar Alexei I of Russia.

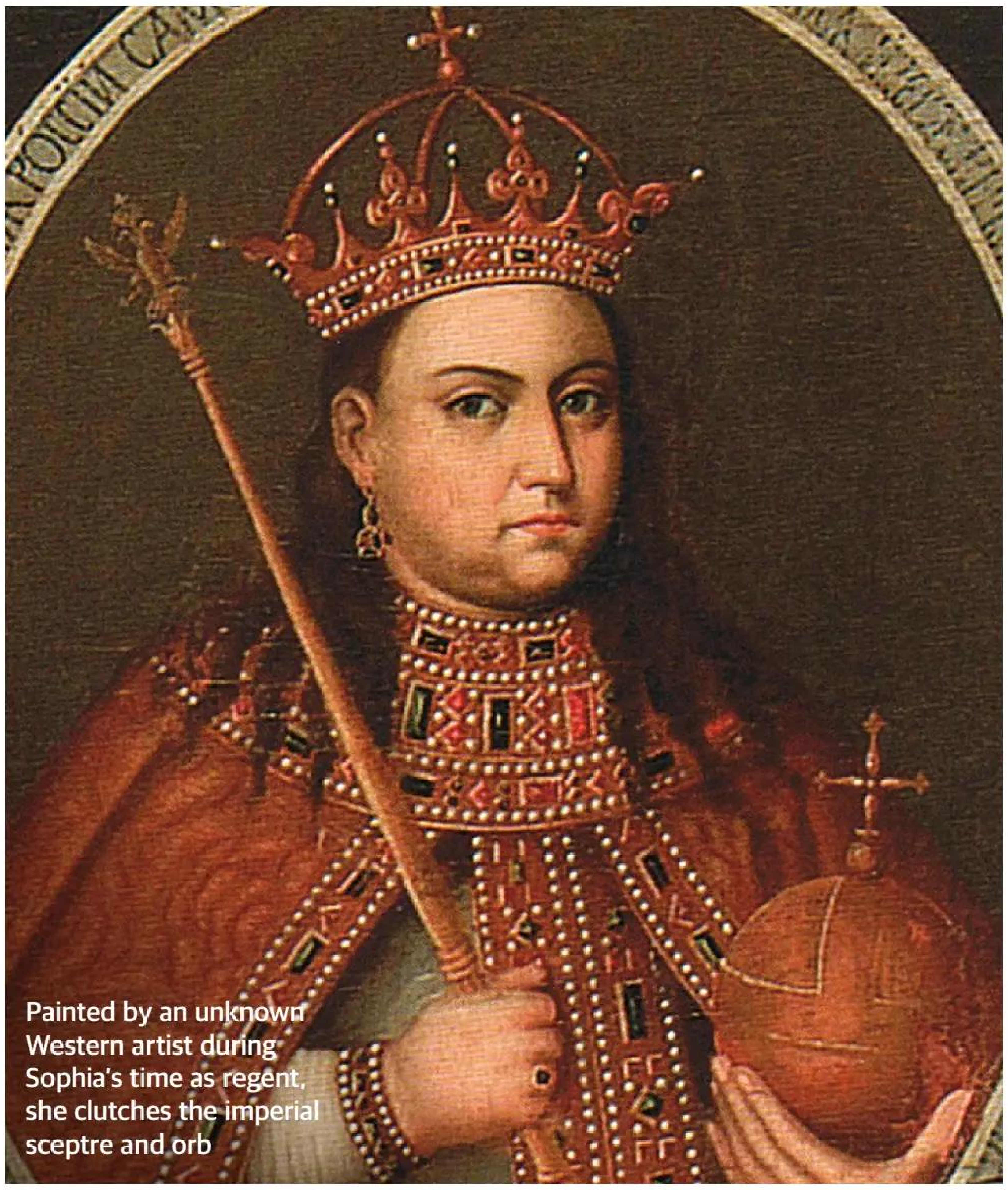
Sophia Alekseyevna

b.1657–d.1704 ♛ Regent: 1682–1689

Sophia was the daughter of Alexei and the sister of Feodor III, the short-lived tsar whose 20-year life had been plagued by infirmities. At a time when women were largely veiled and withheld from power, the fact that Sophia Alekseyevna became a regent - and therefore a ruler - of Russia was quite an achievement. She was regent over her two younger brothers, tsars Ivan and Peter.

It was in the field of foreign policy that Sophia secured some major political achievements. Russia and Poland had long fought over Ukraine, and especially its important city of Kiev. Sophia's single most influential adviser was Vasily Vasilyevich Golitsyn, a Westernised statesman from one of the great aristocratic houses, the Golitsyns. In negotiations between Russian and Polish diplomats, a settlement was reached: Poland gave up its claim to Kiev in return for Russia joining in the fight against the Ottoman Empire. It was also during Sophia's regency that the first Russo-Chinese treaty - the Treaty of Nerchinsk of 1689 - was signed.

Sophia's downfall came about in a decidedly odd way. Tsar Peter - now 17 - was in Preobrazhenskoye, a district of Moscow, when a frantic attendant woke him from his sleep warning him that the streltsy (Russian guards) were on their way to seize him and help Sophia secure power. Peter promptly fled to the Troitsky Monastery. Although there hadn't been any actual danger, the fact that the young tsar had taken refuge in a holy place was enough to make many supporters flock to his side. Eventually, Sophia was forced from her position as regent and was sent to the Novodevichy Convent, where she died on 14 July 1704.



Painted by an unknown Western artist during Sophia's time as regent, she clutches the imperial sceptre and orb

Elizabeth b.1709–d.1762 ♛ 1741–1762

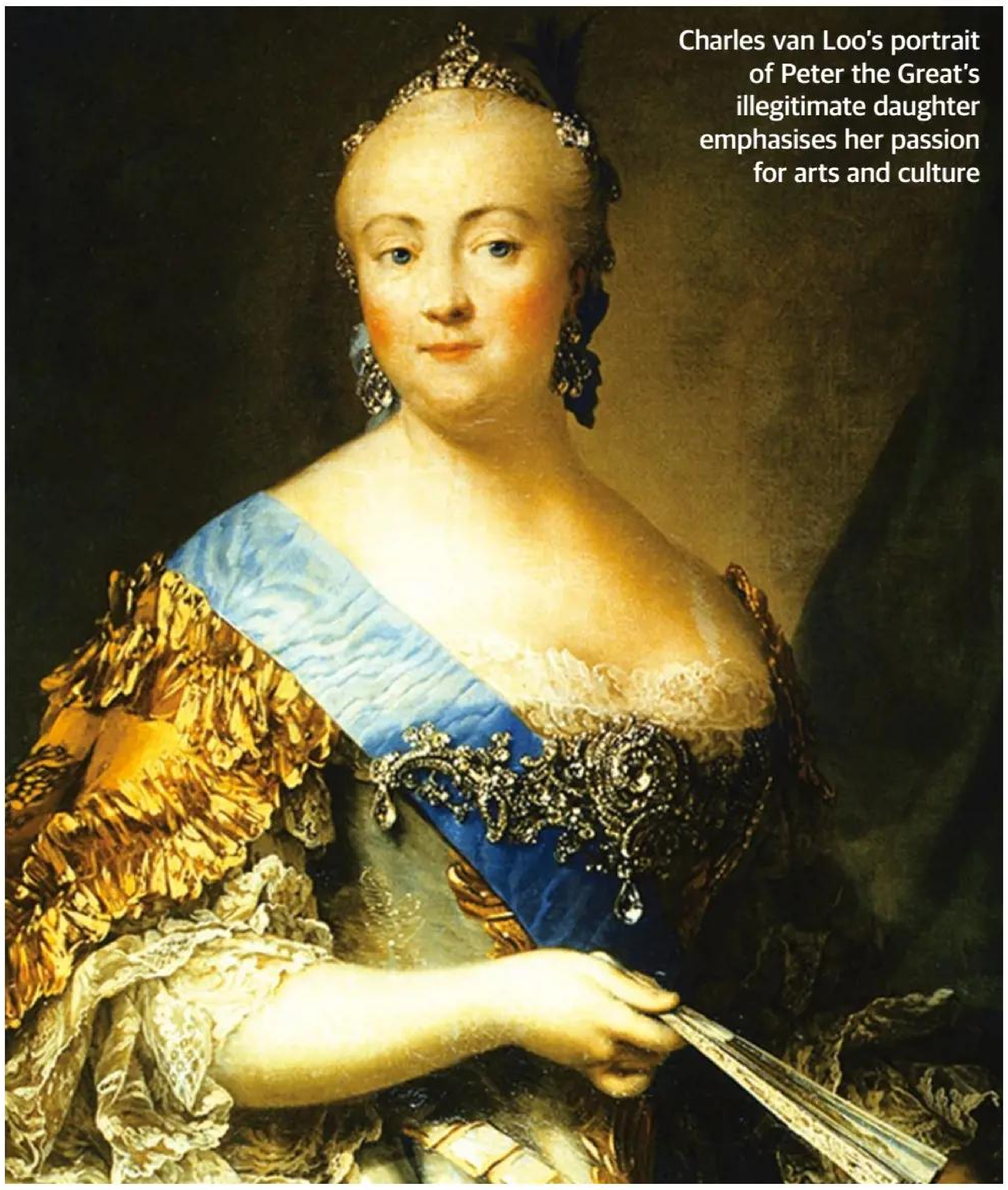
Elizabeth, as the illegitimate daughter of Peter the Great and his mistress Catherine, was unlikely to ever rule. Even though her father eventually married her mother, Elizabeth had been born out of wedlock in 1709. Peter loved his children, and it appears that he took an active interest in their education, as far as time permitted.

Elizabeth, with her blue eyes, blonde tresses and vivacious personality, was considered very attractive. This, combined with her intelligence and education, was why Peter hoped to arrange a great marriage for her. One match he sought for Elizabeth was with King Louis XV of France, but her possible illegitimacy – combined with the fact that her mother had been a peasant – was enough to put an end to these aspirations.

In the autumn of 1726, Elizabeth met Prince Charles Augustus of Holstein and the two fell in love. They were ready to announce their engagement in early 1727 when Elizabeth's mother sickened and died.

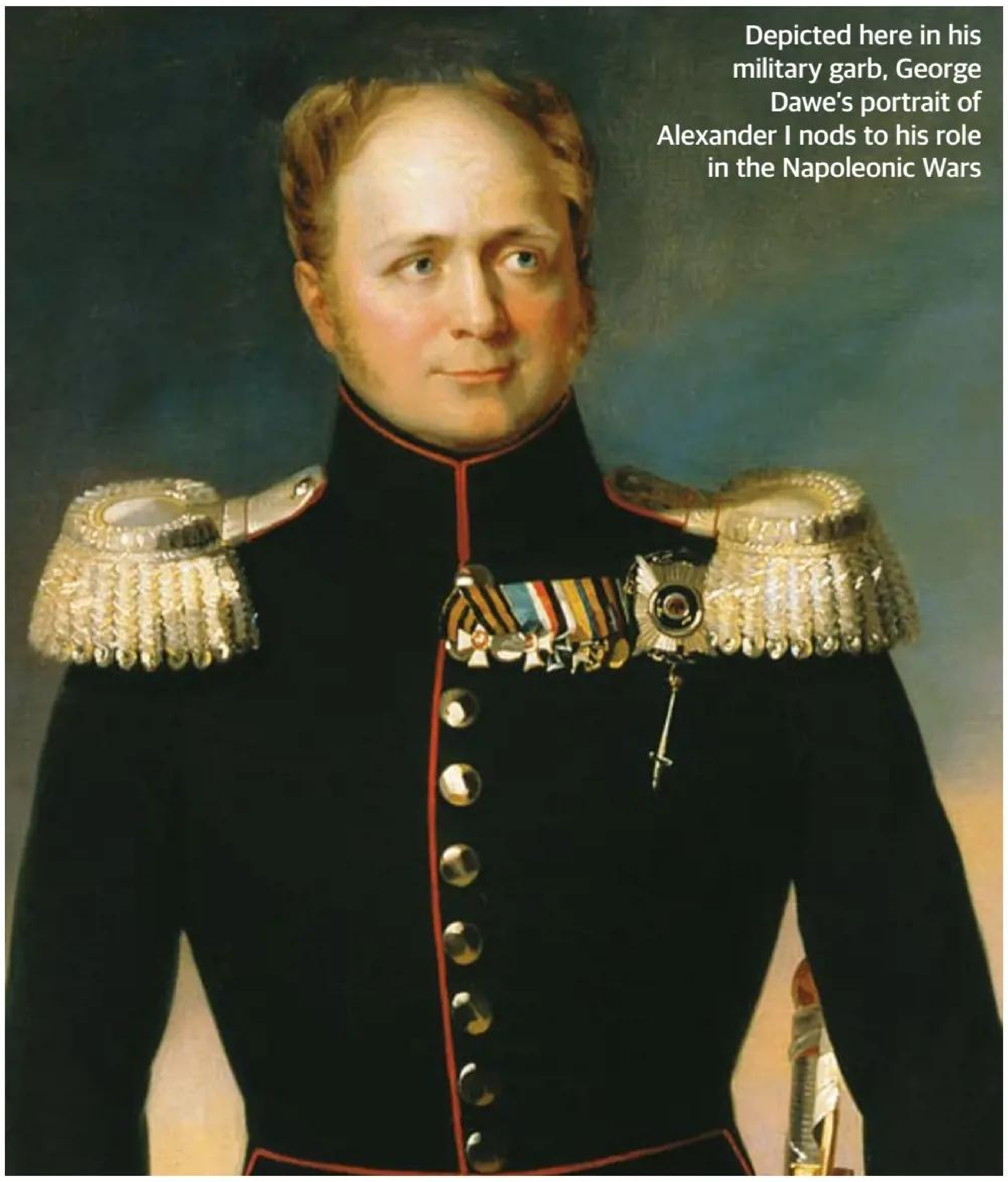
One terrible grief soon followed another, as only a month later, Elizabeth's beloved fiancé contracted smallpox and perished. Elizabeth never officially married (although she was rumoured to have secretly wed her lover Alexei Razumovsky – her Ukrainian "Emperor of the Night").

Elizabeth's sister, Grand Duchess Anna Petrovna, married Charles Frederick, Duke of Holstein-Gottorp, the brother of Prince Charles Augustus, but his boorish behaviour and the separation from her sister made her very unhappy. In February 1728, Anna gave birth to her only child, a son, but she sadly died from a fever a few weeks later aged only 20. The loss of her dear sister was yet another blow for Elizabeth. When she died, her nephew Karl Peter Ulrich succeeded her as Tsar Peter III.



Charles van Loo's portrait of Peter the Great's illegitimate daughter emphasises her passion for arts and culture

Alexander I b.1777–d.1825 ♛ 1801–1825



Depicted here in his military garb, George Dawe's portrait of Alexander I nods to his role in the Napoleonic Wars

Alexander was the son of Tsar Paul I, who was himself the son of Catherine the Great and Tsar Peter III (though some continued to speculate his father was Serge Saltykov). Empress Catherine favoured her grandson Alexander over her son Paul, and this created a rather difficult dynamic. In 1793, Alexander married the beautiful Princess Louise of Baden. This marriage began happily enough, but over time – and with the death of their two daughters – their relationship deteriorated. When Tsar Paul was assassinated in 1801, Alexander became tsar.

Best known for being the tsar of Leo Tolstoy's epic historical novel *War and Peace,* set during the Napoleonic Wars, Alexander I endured a turbulent friendship with Napoleon Bonaparte. Alexander was present at the Battle of Austerlitz in 1805 and was in power when Napoleon invaded Russia in 1812, during which the Battle of Borodino was fought.

He also had connections to Queen Victoria of Britain. When she was born at Kensington Palace in 1819, she was christened Alexandrina Victoria in honour of him, her godfather.

Alexander died from typhus on 1 December 1825. As none of his legitimate children had survived, his brother became his successor as Tsar Nicholas I. This was by no means a smooth transition. On 26 December that year, an uprising that came to be known as the Decembrist Revolt took place in Peter's Square in St. Petersburg. Led by army officers at the head of some 3,000 soldiers, these protestors were alarmed that Nicholas' older brother, Constantine, had been overlooked. The reality was that Constantine had no desire to become tsar. The uprising had been for naught. Nicholas' would reign for 30 years until his death in 1855.

Images: Getty Images, Alamy

The Winter Palace

Home to the tsars of Russia since 1732, the magnificent Winter Palace in St. Petersburg boasts 1,500 rooms, 1,945 windows, and spans over 14 hectares. The first iteration of the palace was commissioned by Peter I, who founded the city, and opened in 1711. Inspired by the architecture he'd seen in Europe during a diplomatic mission there in 1697–98, Peter ordered numerous palatial buildings to be constructed in his new city. Perhaps conscious that the original Winter Palace was a rather simple structure (it was a two-storey timber building), Peter commissioned a second, which was completed in 1721 and built using stone. It was here that he would die in 1725, and just seven years later work would begin on the third Winter Palace during the reign of Empress Anne. Construction of the fourth and final palace began in 1754. Designed in Elizabethan Baroque style by a number of architects, including the Italian Bartolomeo Rastrelli, its interior had to be rebuilt following an inferno in 1837, but the striking exterior, with its pillars and eye-catching green paint, is the same today as it was upon completion in 1762.

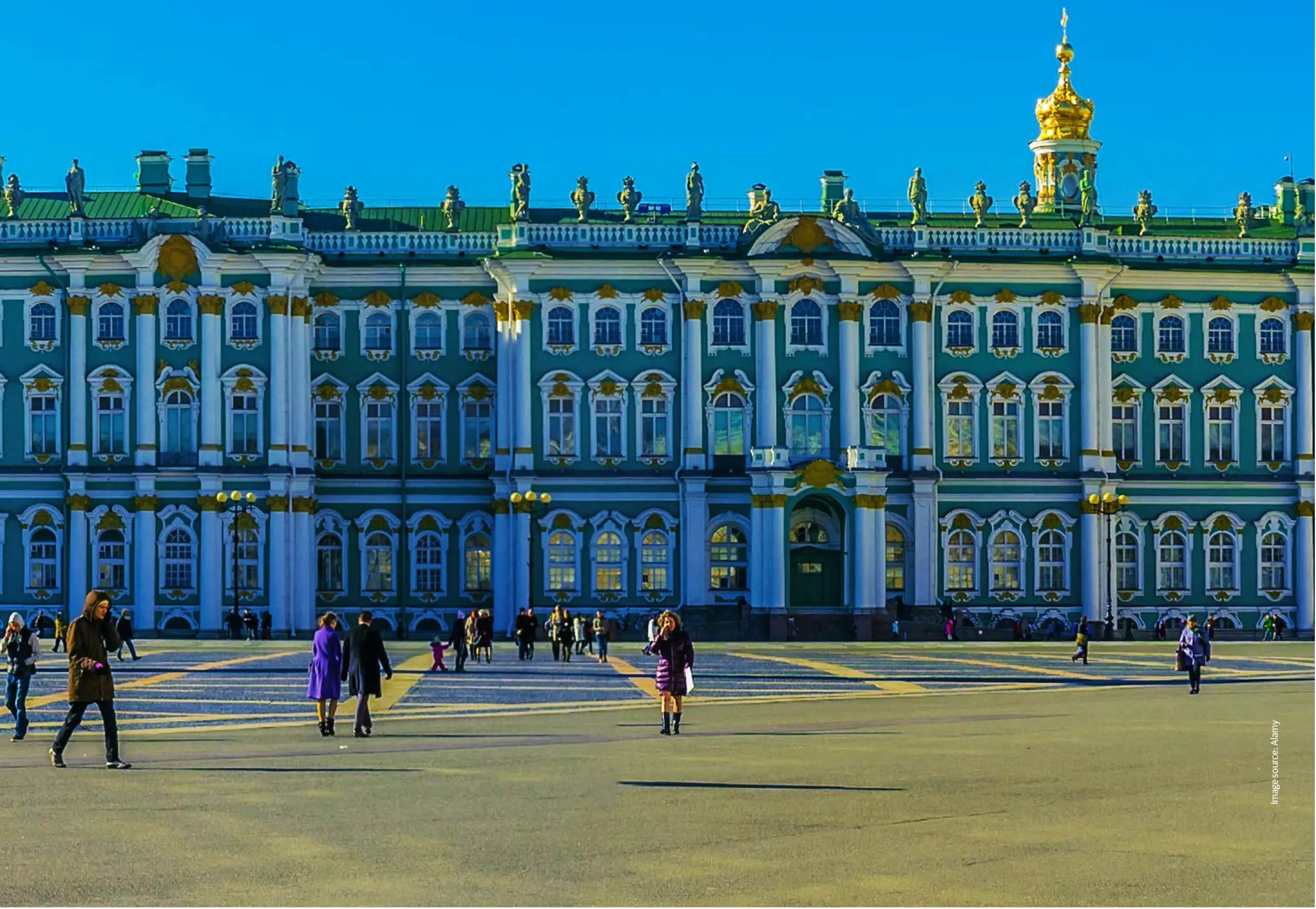


Image source: Alamy

Peter I

The great transformer

THE RESTLESS TSAR WHO DRAGGED RUSSIA INTO THE FUTURE

Written by Derek Wilson

We cannot identify a fixed date on which Muscovy became Russia. The Rus' were a loose federation of Slavic peoples who, in the Middle Ages, dominated a large territory from the Baltic to the Black Sea. The Grand Duchy of Muscovy, centred on Moscow, was one of the principalities of this federation. Its expansion began during the reigns of Ivan III and Ivan IV, when Muscovy overran large areas of Rus territory. This success had its downside. Although the tsardom increased its tax-paying population and its natural resources, it also increased its administrative borders, not to mention the costs of military action. Despite its expansion, Russia suffered serious geo-economic restraints. Its only direct access to oceanic trade routes was via the White Sea in the far north, a waterway ice-bound for more than half the year. In any case, Russia had little to export in terms of high-value national products.

The nation's semi-isolation was particularly inauspicious because it coincided with the rapid intellectual and technical advances associated in Western Europe with the Renaissance and the Reformation. Modernising tsars - and there were several - conscious of the need to close the gap between their country and the more advanced neighbouring states found themselves in a paradoxical situation. The political tradition guaranteed them autocratic power and the freedom to impose their own policies, but the mindset that governed policy-making was steeped in rigid conservatism. The tsars ruled in close collaboration with the leaders of the Russian Church, whose historic theology and liturgy had their roots in the Orthodox practices of Constantinople and who rejected Roman Catholicism and, by extension, Protestantism as heretical. Civil society was held together by the boyars, whose attitudes were similarly hidebound, and there was no entrepreneurial middle class of any consequence to champion economic change. The bedrock of society was serfdom. Peasant families were tied to the land and, like the land, were owned by their masters. Subservient to their lords, their priests and their tsars, there was little trace of the social dynamic that helped to power socio-economic change in the West. This was the rigid, stratified system that Peter I inherited.

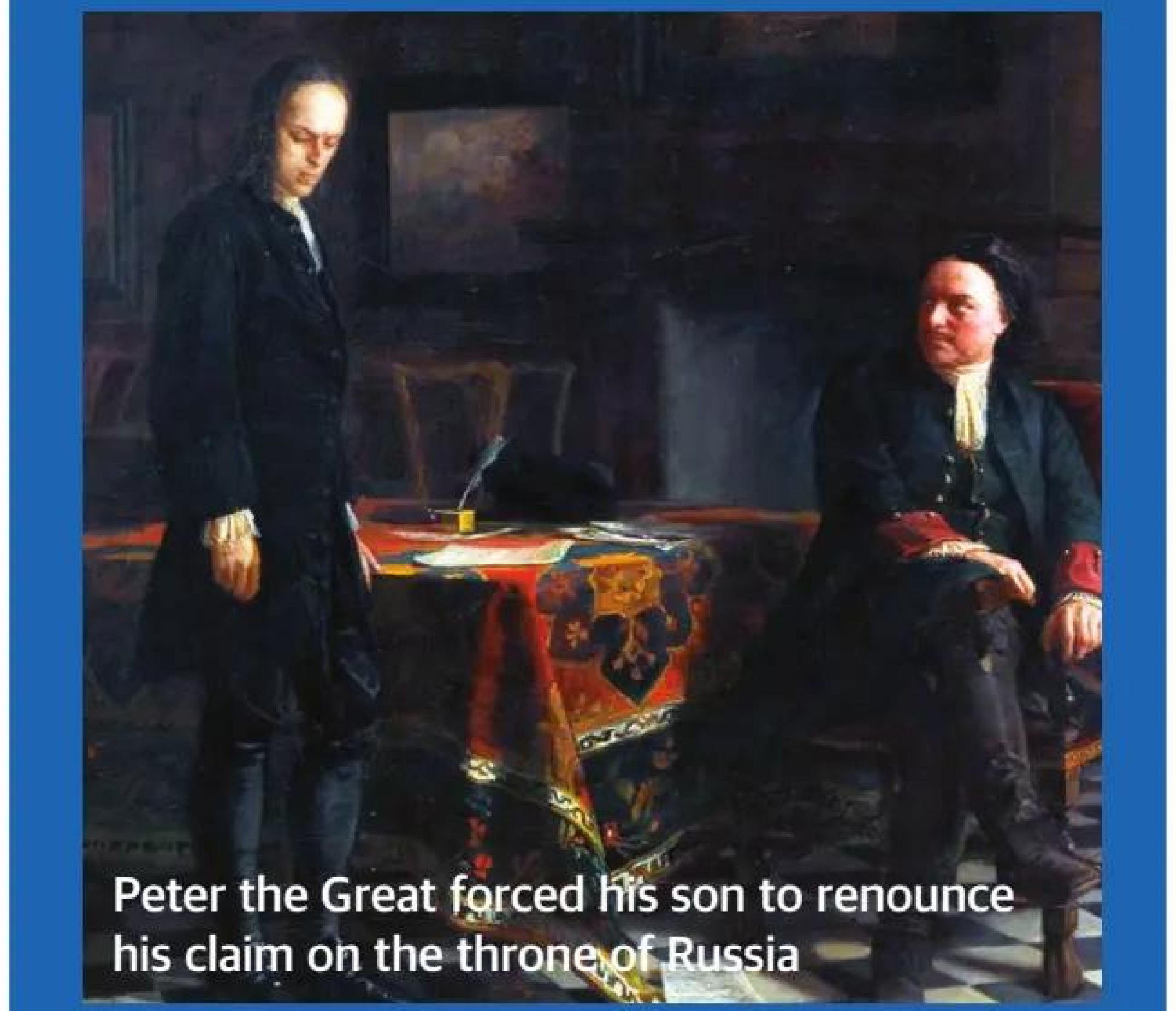
There was much about it that he hated, and his childhood traumas must have had much to do with his rejection of what went on at the heart of the Muscovite regime. Yet, at the same time, he was able to use the absolutism that regime provided to enforce change. He was happy to leave stuffy court-and-church ritual to his half-brother while he spent time with his own companions, such as Westerners in the foreign quarter of Kokui or in his own alternative court, which was an irreverent parody of the solemn, priest-dominated court at the Kremlin. The wild, orgiastic antics of Peter and his friends verged on the blasphemous. Yet his alternative court was no mere drinking club. The distinction between mock court and real court was blurred. Indeed, the two overlapped. Just as Peter's play regiments developed eventually into units of the Russian army, so the pseudo-governmental assemblies merged with the executive departments. Several of Peter's roistering friends held important posts in government. From the beginning, the tsar was determined to draw his advisers not from the families that expected to be involved in government but from men he trusted - men of all ranks, even foreigners.

Peter took his despising of rank and formality to extremes. He loathed the pomp and ceremony that inevitably went with his role as head of state. In his mind there was a distinction between the trappings of monarchy and the business of ruling. This was demonstrated most pointedly in later years when he built magnificent palaces to rival Versailles while preferring to live in a log cabin. In his 'pretend' court he did not play the role of prince; he was a mere acolyte in the train of the pretend tsar, a title bestowed on one of his friends. When writing to his 'superiors', he would sign himself "Archdeacon Peter". This paralleled the subordination he affected in military and diplomatic affairs. In the army and navy he assumed minor officer rank, and when he and his entourage went on a grand European tour in 1697 he posed as an official in the train of one of

A posthumous portrait of Peter the Great painted by Paul Delaroche in 1838

The tragedy of Alexis

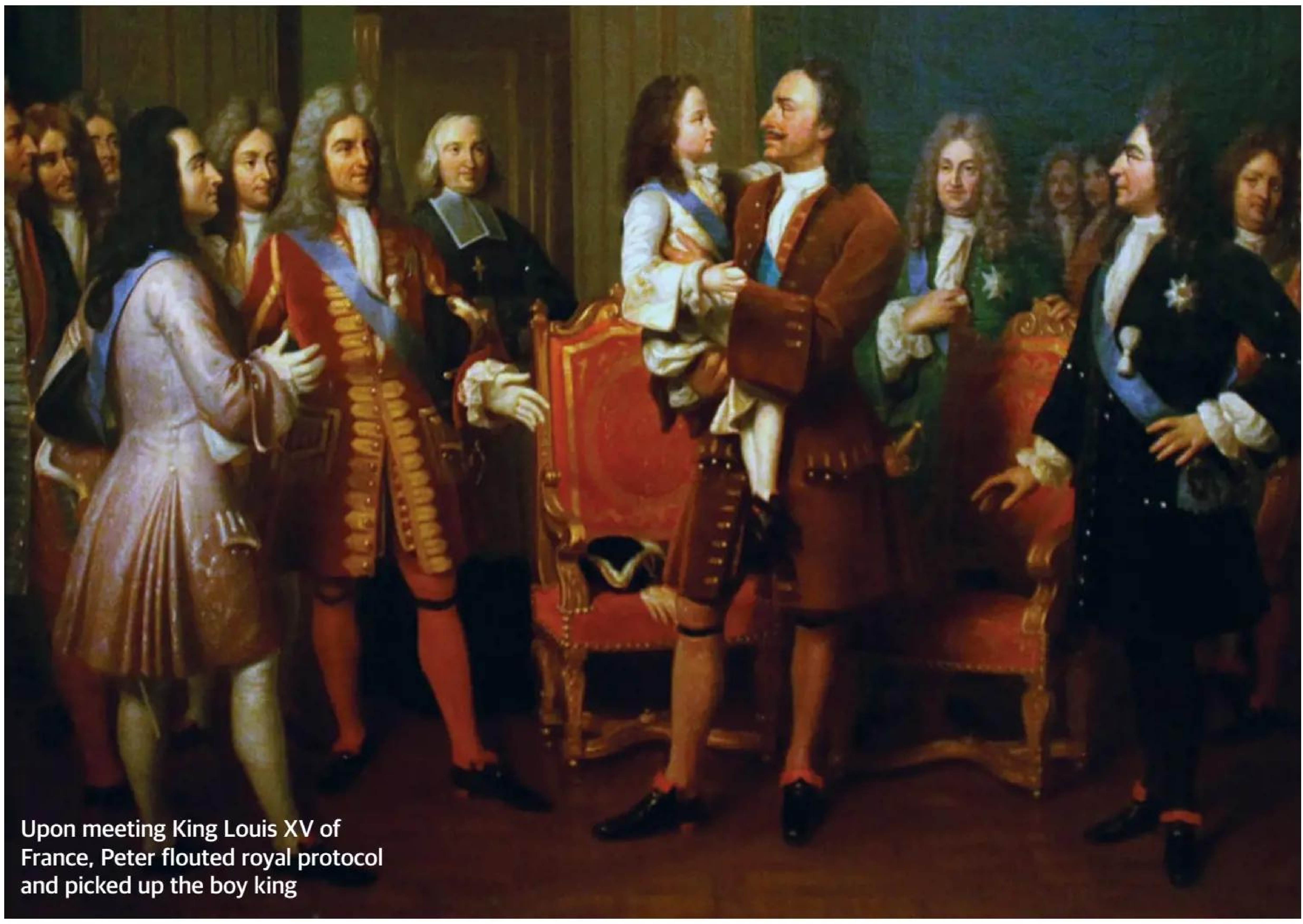
PETER COLDLY IGNORED HIS SON – WITH APPALLING CONSEQUENCES



Peter the Great forced his son to renounce his claim on the throne of Russia

When in 1698 Peter terminated his first marriage and sent his wife, Eudoxia, to a nunnery, he separated her from her eight-year-old son, Alexis. Had he taken the boy under his wing he might have trained him to be a worthy successor. Instead he showed his heir no affection and entrusted his upbringing to tutors. There was, therefore, an emotional void in Alexis' life, which left him open to the influence of conservative forces who hoped that, when he came to the throne, he would undo his father's reforms. Not until the boy was 12 did his father seek to inculcate in him his own policies and ideals. It was too late.

Alexis lacked his father's energy and convictions, and when he tried to follow instructions he was frequently dismissed as lazy and incompetent. In 1711, Alexis was married, for raison d'état, to a German princess. She died in 1715, and Alexis immediately tried to escape with his mistress to Austria. Peter tracked him down and promised to allow him a quiet life if he renounced his claim to the succession. Alexis kept his side of the bargain. Peter did not. He had his son imprisoned and tortured to discover the names of people suspected of plotting against him. As a result of Alexis' forced confession he was sentenced to death, but he died as a result of the treatment he had received in prison.



Upon meeting King Louis XV of France, Peter flouted royal protocol and picked up the boy king

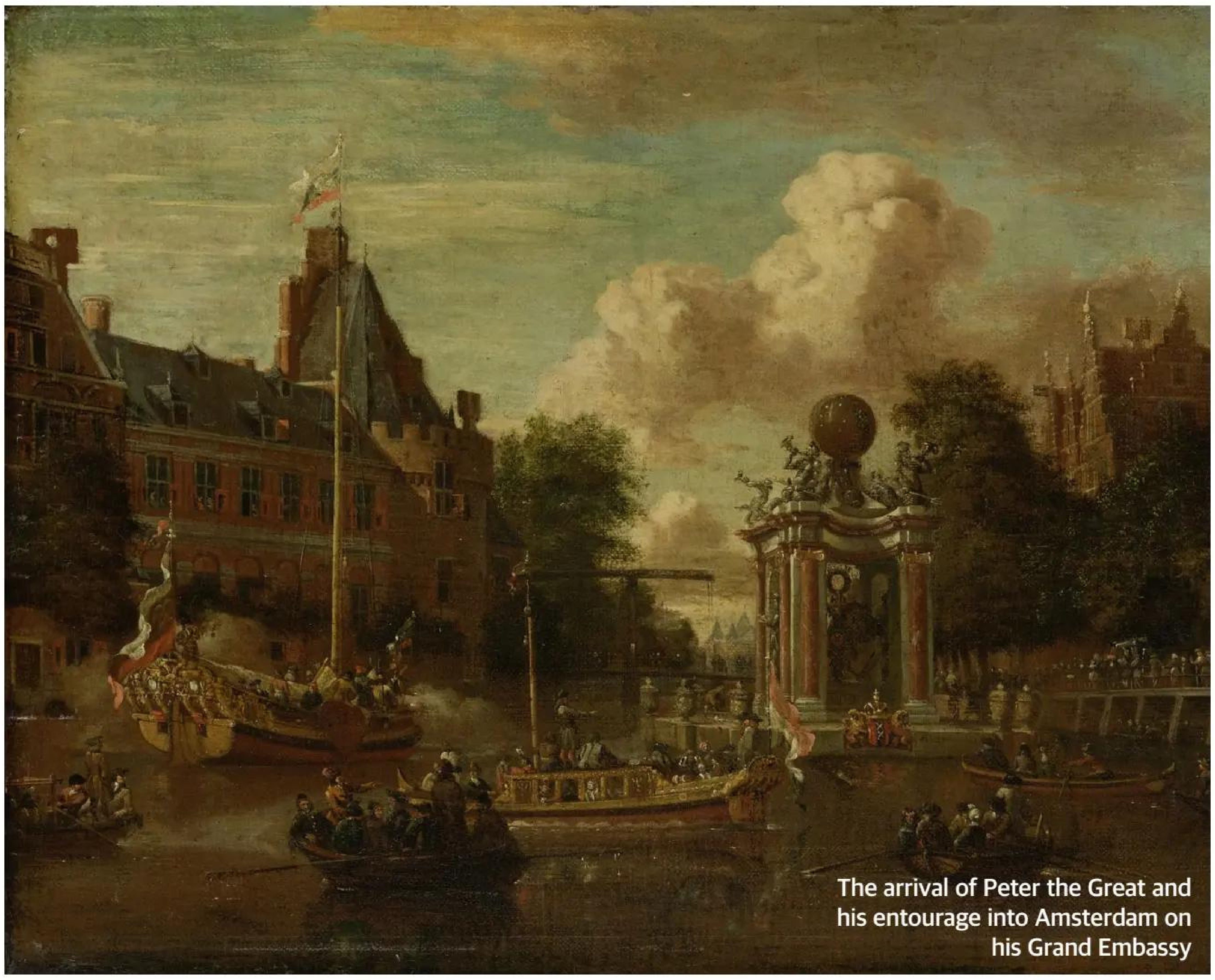
his ambassadors. This was partly an expression of his love of acting, but it disguised a more serious purpose.

When visiting foreign countries he wanted to be free to travel at will, without the time- and energy-wasting business of official receptions, formal banquets and welcoming ceremonies. Peter had an insatiable thirst for knowledge and was particularly interested in mastering practical skills such as woodworking or sailing a warship. He could only do this by getting alongside carpenters and crewmen. It is doubtful whether his incognito was ever wholly effective, particularly given his size and his behaviour. Not only was he a head taller than most of his companions, he was constantly restless. Unable to sit still for long, he would stride about with jerky, energetic steps, his eyes darting to and fro and his lips twitching. However, Peter did go to considerable lengths to escape the demands of protocol – and for good foreign policy reasons.

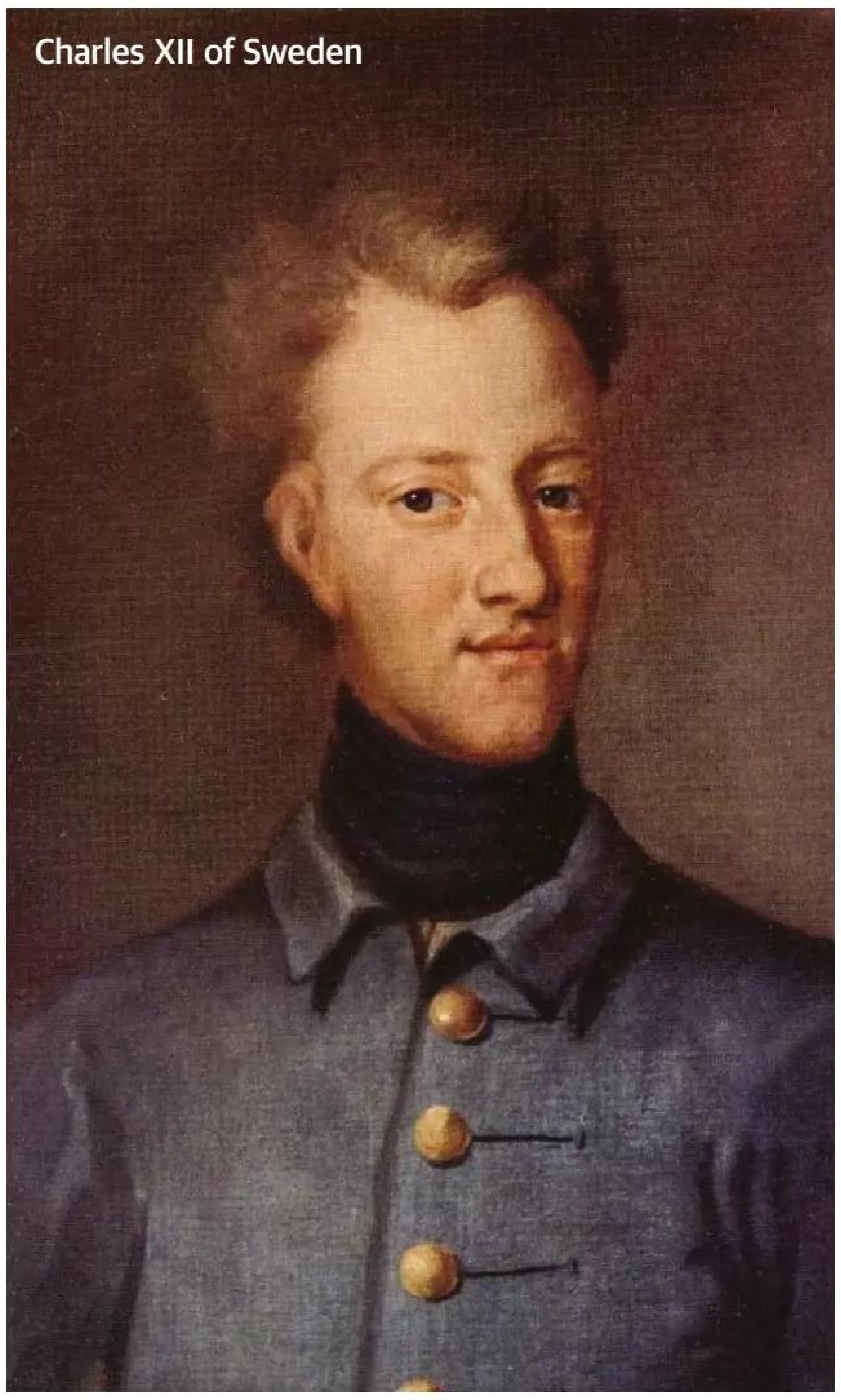
The 1697 extended tour, known as the Grand Embassy, was a vital hands-on venture into practical diplomacy by the young tsar. The expedition took in the north German states, the Netherlands, England, Austria and Poland. As well as learning firsthand what the leading European powers were doing, the tsar wanted to impress upon them that Russia was a major player in the affairs of the continent. Peter was also deliberately poaching. Whenever he discovered a craftsman or military expert or shipbuilder who he thought could be of use to him, he made an offer the recipient found hard to refuse.

During these months Peter learned an enormous amount, and he wasted no time putting it into practice. A spate of institutional reforms poured forth from the office of the industrious tsar in the years following his return. He overhauled the taxation system and established a department of state to oversee the ecclesiastical courts, the administration of church lands, and even the daily routine of monks and nuns. Just because some Russians were devoted to a life of religion, that did not absolve them from being efficient and accountable to the tsar. With the aid of leading academics from Britain, Peter set up the Moscow School of Mathematics and Navigation. He established a printworks and gave his literate subjects their first regular newspaper. Peter was conscious of having so much to do and so little time in which to do it. He slept little, regularly rising before dawn, and put in several hours' work before most of his officials had reached their desks. If he upbraided them for laziness, as he frequently did, it was because he needed less rest than they did.

> "Peter was conscious of having so much to do and so little time in which to do it"



The arrival of Peter the Great and his entourage into Amsterdam on his Grand Embassy



Charles XII of Sweden

The demon driving him forced his body to keep pace with a mind constantly conceiving new ideas. It is not in the least surprising that his people struggled to keep pace with the reforms their tsar imposed on them, nor that many of those reforms were deeply resented. Peter ordained that the traditional Russian dress of the upper classes was to be abandoned in favour of European fashions, and even that beards were to be trimmed in order to conform to the Western style. Another drastic reform that affected every single one of his subjects was the change of the calendar.

Until this point all date calculations had been based on the Orthodox calendar, which took the supposed creation of the world as its starting point. Peter decreed that the calendar was to be brought into line with the Julian calendar used in Protestant countries and based on the birth of Christ. The year 7209 thus became 1700 CE and New Year's Day was moved from 1 September to 1 January. Inevitably, Peter's comprehensive reforms were not all successful, but this did not deter him. He was a prime example of the maxim later put forward by another great man, Abraham Lincoln: "Success is going from failure to failure without losing your enthusiasm."

One of Peter's failures was not persuading other nations to join with him in Russia's long-standing conflict with Turkey. This did not

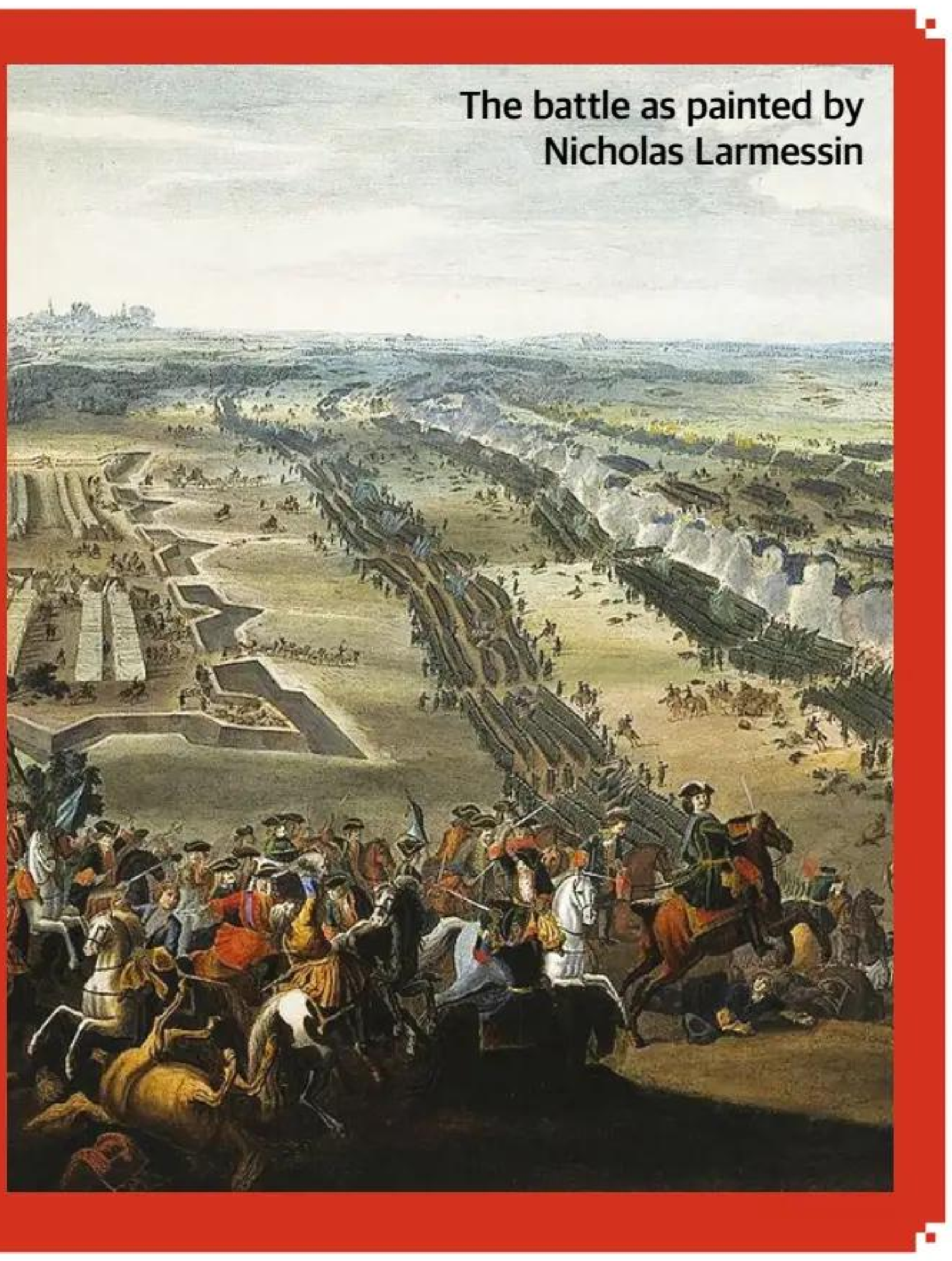
Poltava 1709

THIS BATTLE WAS DESCRIBED BY DANIEL DEFOE AS "AN ARMY OF VETERANS BEATEN BY A MOB"

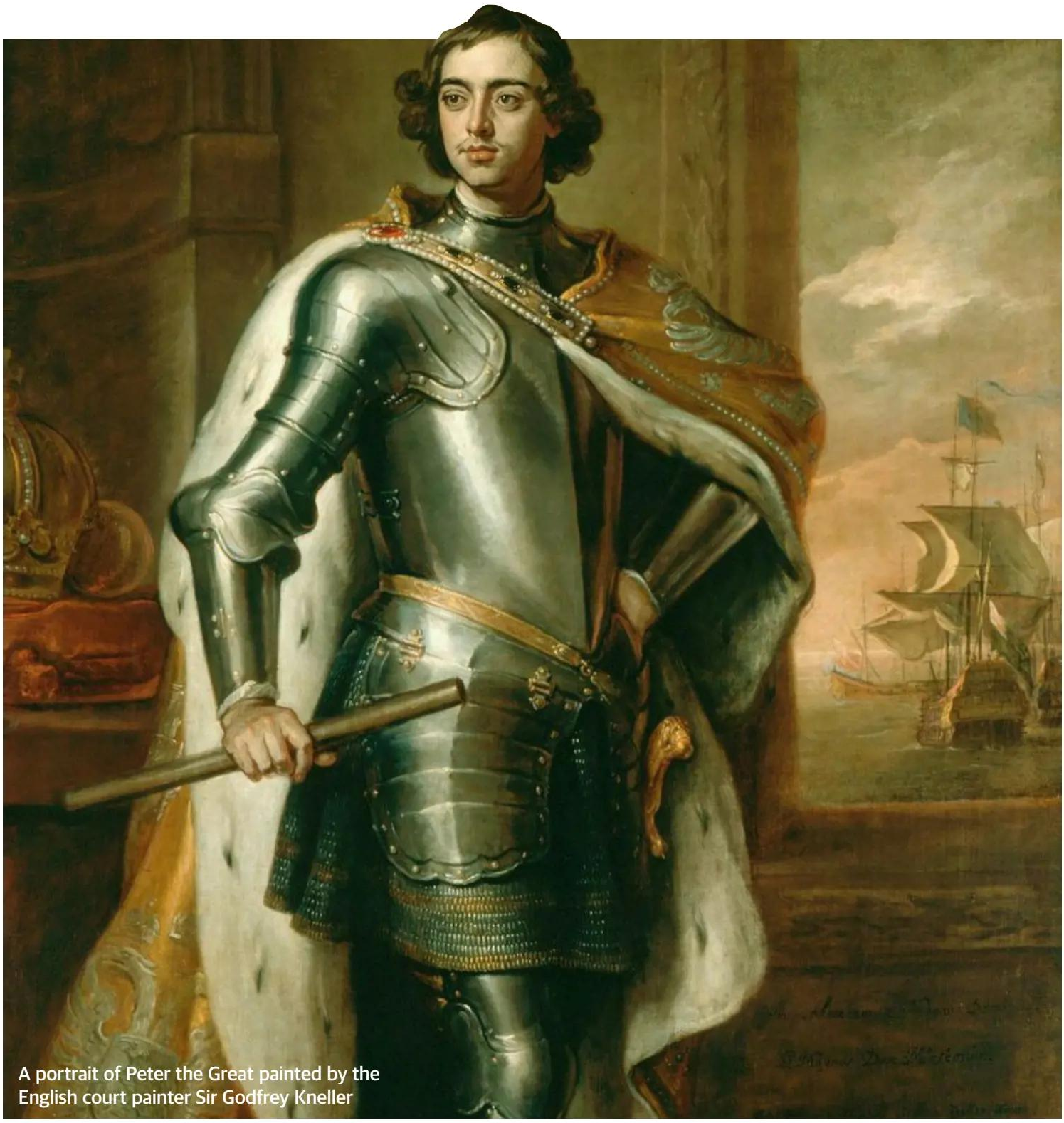
On 8 July 1709, Peter confronted Charles XII in a showdown to decide who held the military supremacy in Eastern Europe. Charles, acknowledged as the finest strategist of the age, had decided to march his army into Moscow. He was thwarted not by Peter's superior skill as a general but by a series of misfortunes. Charles decided to rest his men in Ukraine for the winter and rendezvous there with another army coming from the port of Riga. The winter of 1709 turned out to be the worst in living memory. The Swedes, far from home in alien territory, suffered from famine and frostbite, and 5,000-8,000 died. Peter's army experienced the same conditions, but their supply lines were secure and they were able to see out the winter.

When spring arrived, Charles heard that his reinforcements were severely delayed. Peter stationed his 40,000 men in a defensive position near the town of Poltava and waited for the army of 25,000 Swedes to attack.

Charles' final misfortune was to be wounded by a musket shot in a skirmish, which prevented him from assuming command in the field. Peter waited while the Swedes exhausted themselves attacking a series of redoubts. Only after several hours did Peter march out his men for the battle. Now superior numbers told. The Swedes lost two-fifths of their army in casualties and prisoners, Charles fled into exile, Sweden's Baltic supremacy collapsed, and Russia's position as a European power was secured.



The battle as painted by Nicholas Larmessin


A portrait of Peter the Great painted by the English court painter Sir Godfrey Kneller

dissuade him from entering another military alliance with Saxony, Poland, and Denmark against Sweden. What has been called the Great Northern War was a confrontation of these European states with Sweden, which had achieved a dominant position in the Baltic region. The time now seemed right to redress the balance for, in 1697, the Swedish crown passed to the teenage Charles XII. However, what most statesmen failed to realise was that the new, young ruler was a military genius. In terms of sheer determination he was a match for Tsar Peter.

Their first confrontation ended in a crushing and humiliating defeat for Peter. His 40,000-strong army laid siege to the Baltic port of Narva in the autumn of 1700. The tsar calculated that he could take this strategic city before Charles could get there. He was wrong. The Swedish king marched an army of 9,000 well-trained men to Narva and crushed the poorly led Russian troops. Charles rubbed salt into the wound by having a medal struck showing Peter fleeing the field in tears. But now it was Charles' turn to underestimate his foe.

Instead of following up his victory by thrusting deep into Russian territory, he turned his attention to other members of the alliance. This enabled Peter to reorganise his forces and, crucially, to recruit more troops. Russia's great military asset was the size of its serf population. The tsar could always conscript thousands of new troops to make up for those lost in battle. With imperious lack of concern for the suffering of his men, he observed: "The Swedes will go on beating us for a long time but eventually they will teach us how to beat them." In August 1704, Peter was back before the walls of Narva with a much-improved army. This time the garrison was forced to surrender.

Yet this was not Peter's most significant victory. Just 15 months earlier he had captured the small island fortress of Nyenschantz at the eastern end of the Baltic. Control of this bleak, marshy region was of immense strategic importance. It was here that Peter began the building of a new city and port. It would be called St. Petersburg.

Peter was one of those exceedingly rare people who possessed vision of heroic proportions linked with the power and energy to make it a reality. That implied ruthlessness. His battles were won and his buildings created at the cost of many thousands of lives. To pay for ambitious programmes he imposed crippling taxes and debased the coinage, thus promoting inflation. His need for iron to manufacture guns for his army and navy led to the development of new mining and metalworking industries. However, before these could go into full-scale production he met his short-term needs by ordering church bells to be melted down. In any assessment of his reign the achievements must be weighed against the costs.

> *"Peter was one of those exceedingly rare people who possessed vision of heroic proportions"*

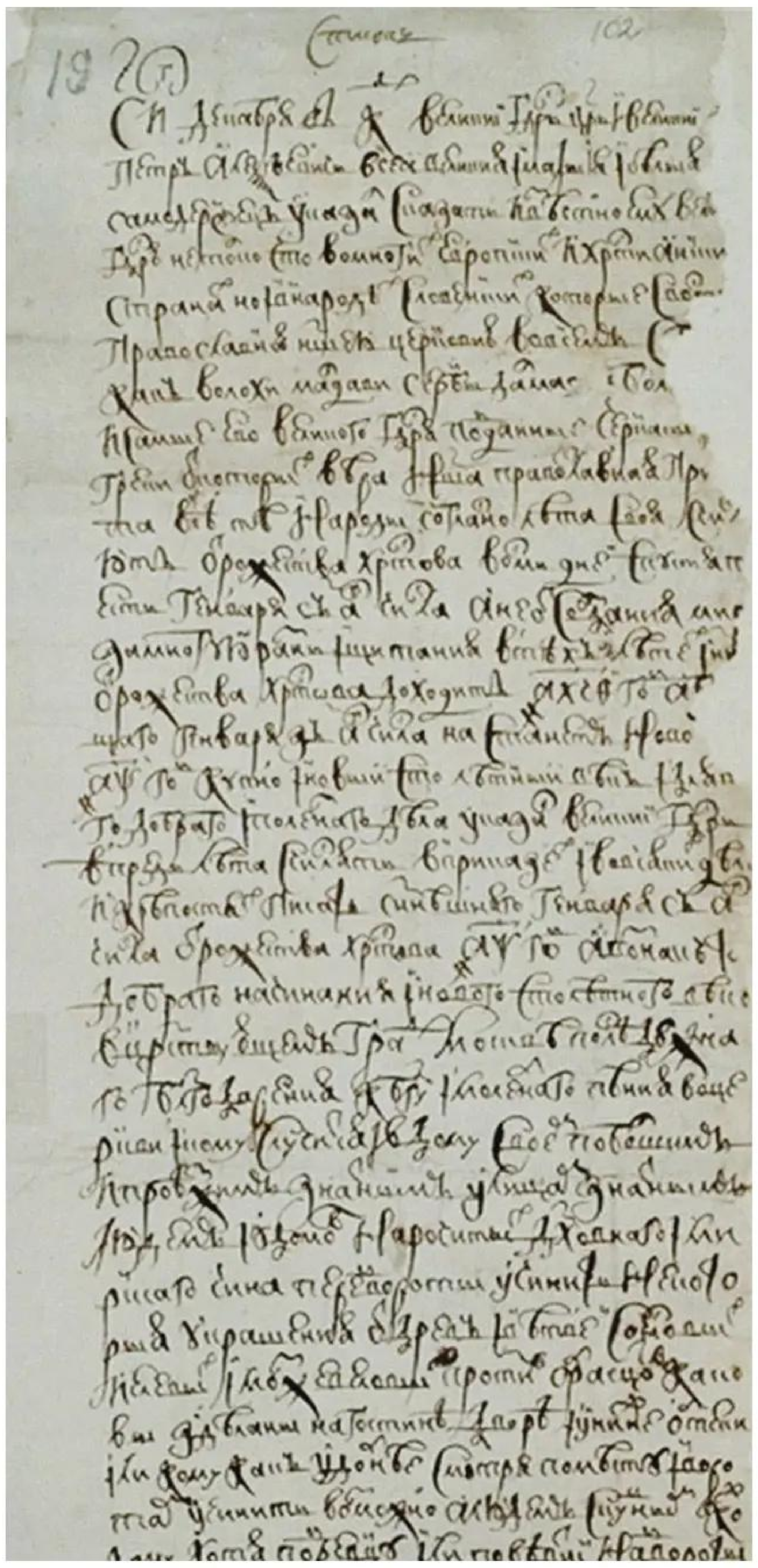
The tsar's personal life was marked by the same impulsiveness and arbitrariness that he manifested in public affairs. At the age of 17 he married Eudoxia Lopukhina, a girl whose beauty was, it would seem, her only asset. She certainly possessed none of the mental and physical stamina the wife of a man like Peter needed. She gave birth to only one son – Alexis – who survived infancy. The marriage rapidly went stale, and in 1698 Peter divorced her and packed her off to a nunnery. The story of Peter's second marriage reads very differently.

In 1702, the Russian army laid siege to Marienburg in Lithuania. Among the hundreds of civilians taken prisoner was Martha Skavronskaya, an 18-year-old servant girl. Martha was not only pretty, she was an extremely strong character, and Peter fell for her instantly. She soon became his constant and dearest companion. She shared his drinking bouts; she accompanied him on military campaigns; she was a buffer between him and the world and the only person who could calm his towering rages. On several occasions she intervened to save men who had provoked his wrath. Perhaps the greatest reason for their bond was Martha's ability to share Peter's love of the simple life.

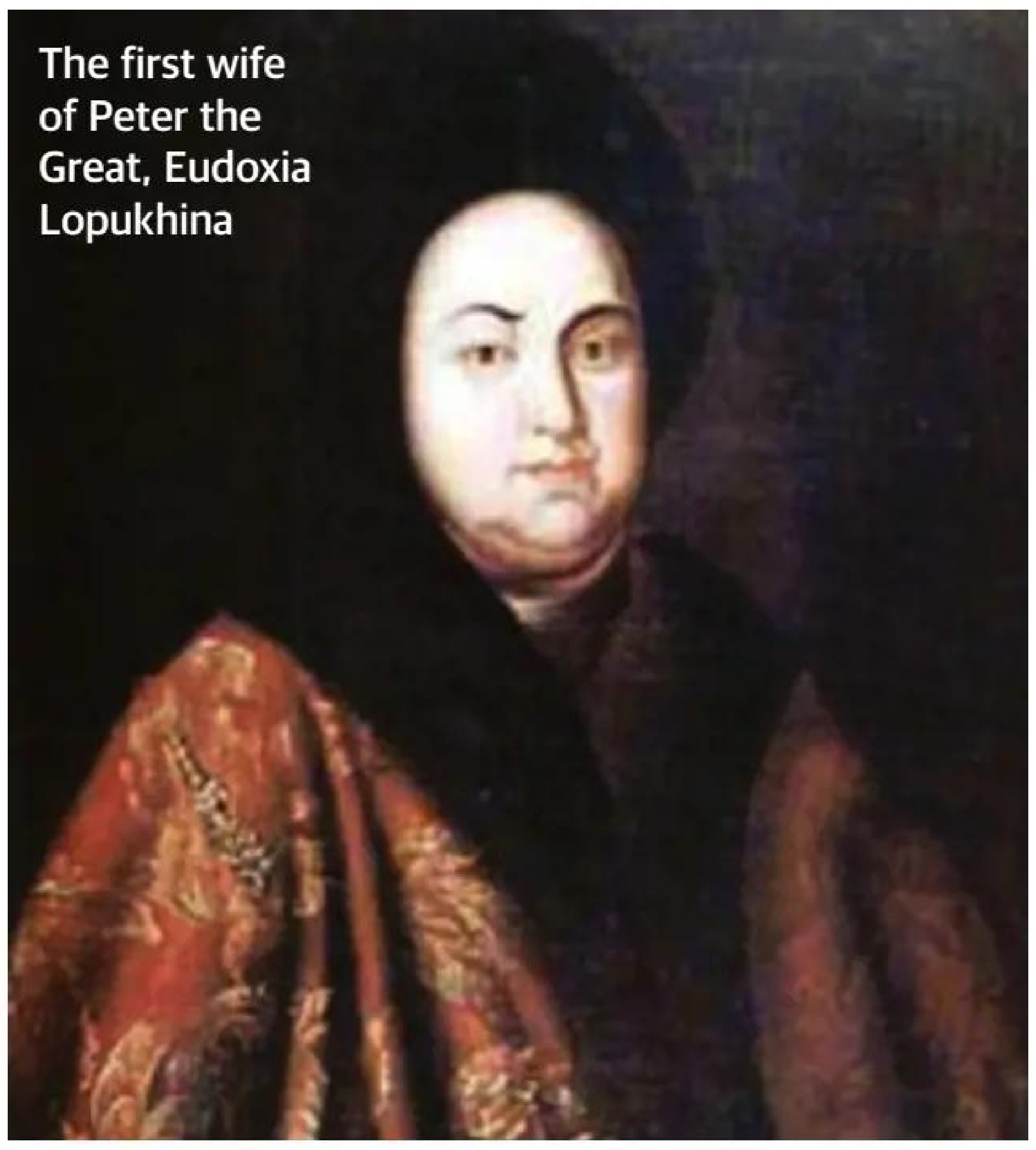
While St. Petersburg was being constructed they lived together in a log cabin, where Martha performed the duties of an ordinary housewife and Peter tended the garden. In 1705, she converted to the Orthodox faith and took the baptismal name of Catherine. Two years later, according to legend, the couple were married in a ceremony that had to be kept secret because many Russians refused to accept the legality of Peter's separation from Eudoxia and would have been scandalised by his marriage to a foreigner – and a peasant at that! In 1712, however, they were married officially. During the early years of their relationship Catherine was almost constantly pregnant, though only two of her children, Anna and Elizabeth, survived infancy. In 1724, she was named co-ruler of Russia.

This was made necessary by the uncertainty governing the succession – an uncertainty for which the tsar was entirely to blame. Peter had always been at enmity with the Tsarevich Alexei, his only son, born to his first wife, the spurned Eudoxia. The boy had become the focus of all the political groups in Russia who hated the Petrine reforms and wanted a return to the old ways. Peter, convinced that the young man was plotting against him, had him arrested, and Alexis died as a result of his treatment in prison in 1718. This left a lengthy list of possible successors: Peter's wife; his two daughters, Anne and Elizabeth; the two daughters of Peter's half-brother, Ivan V, Catherine and Anne; and two grandsons, both named Peter. One was the son of the rejected Alexis and the other was the son of the tsar's elder daughter. By a law passed in 1722, Peter the Great established his right to nominate his own heir, but he never made his wishes known. When he died in 1725 no one knew where Russia was headed. Would the country lurch backwards, returning to its old ways, or would a new ruler emerge capable of building on Peter's achievements?

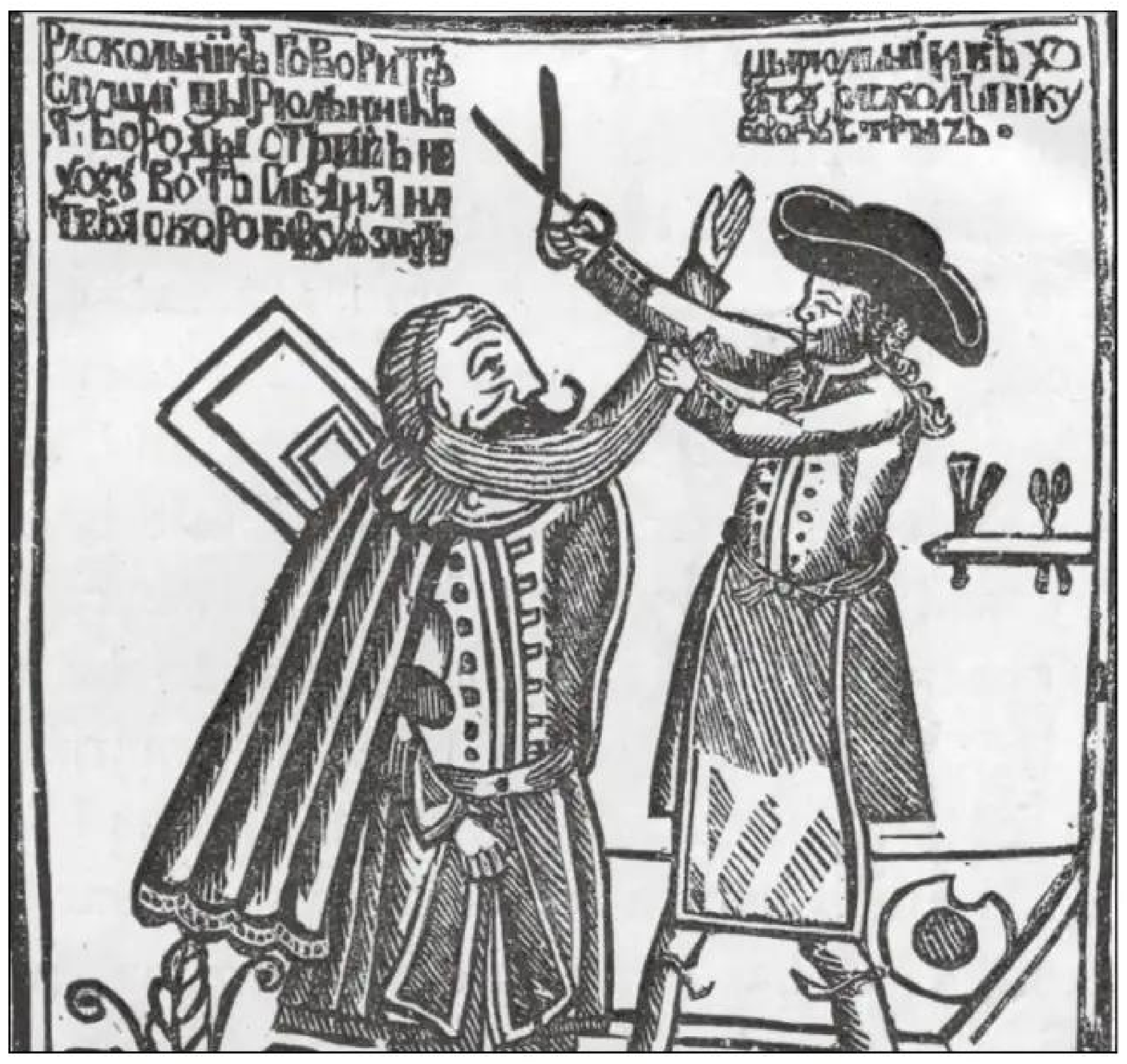
And what were those achievements which, with the advantage of hindsight, we can enumerate? There was scarcely an aspect of Russian life that he did not transform – the army, the navy, international commerce, the institutions of government, industry, the calendar, the coinage, the written language, the way people dressed, education – not to mention the creation of one of Europe's most beautiful cities, St. Petersburg. Peter's reputation has constantly been a matter of dispute. Sometimes he has been judged the worst kind of tyrant; at others he has been seen in the kindly guise of the most benevolent of dictators. Some people see him as the rescuer of his country from the dead hand of the past. Others label him an oppressor of the people, indistinguishable from the despots of earlier centuries. Some praise the ruler who brought his country into the community of leading nations. Others deplore the tsar who was the traitor to everything truly Russian. What is beyond question is that Peter the Great belongs to that tiny collection of rulers who changed his country, changed the age in which he lived, and ultimately changed history.



An edict issued by Peter the Great to change the calendar to the Julian style



The first wife of Peter the Great, Eudoxia Lopukhina



A woodcut produced on the orders of Peter the Great to encourage the shaving of beards

Peter's trusted advisers

THE TSAR CHOSE THE MEN TO PLACE IN HIGH OFFICE, THOUGH NOT ALWAYS WISELY

Two examples give us some idea of the men Peter trusted. General Patrick Gordon was a Scottish Catholic and royalist who left Britain when Cromwell came to power and became a mercenary soldier. In 1660, he became one of several Scots serving in the Russian army. Tsar Alexis was very impressed with Gordon and promoted him to general, the only foreigner to hold that rank. In the crisis of 1689, when Sophia attempted to seize power, Gordon's swift action turned the tables and probably saved Peter's life. The bond formed between the two men was so close that Gordon was left in control of Moscow during Peter's Grand Embassy. In 1698, he suppressed a streltsy uprising. When Gordon died the following year Peter ordered his funeral to be observed with full Catholic ritual.

Alexander Menshikov was a Muscovite of very humble origins whose main characteristic was self-promotion. He joined the young tsar's toy regiments at Preobrazhenskoye and went on to serve in Peter's earlier military campaigns. He proved himself an extremely effective field general and was steadily promoted, but what cemented the friendship was his 'passing on' to the tsar his mistress, Martha Skavronskaya. Peter lavished titles and lands on his friend, but Menshikov repaid this generosity with corruption. On many occasions only his charm protected him from Peter's anger. After the tsar's death he became instrumental in transferring power to Peter's widow, the Empress Catherine I.

©Getty

Catherine II

Sex, lies and military might

HOW THE UNSTOPPABLE RUSSIAN RULER ENTHRALLED AN EMPIRE

Written by Jessica Leggett

She has gone down in history as Catherine the Great thanks to her dedication and devotion to her adopted country. One of the Russia's greatest leaders, Catherine oversaw its unprecedented expansion, a series of military successes and the arrival of the Russian Enlightenment. Her reign is considered the golden age of Russia, but her time on the throne was full of salacious scandal, intrigue and hidden truths that others used to tarnish her legacy. So, what really happened during her reign?

Catherine was born in 1729 as Princess Sophie of Anhalt-Zerbst, an impoverished German royal. Her prospects were dim until Elizabeth, empress of Russia, wrote to Sophie's mother proposing a match with her nephew and heir, Grand Duke Peter of Holstein. It was keenly accepted and Sophie was determined to seize her destiny, learning to speak Russian fluently, which greatly impressed Elizabeth. She seemed to be a perfect fit for the Russian throne.

In contrast, her betrothed was a terrible choice for an emperor. Born and raised in Germany, Peter was brought to Russia aged 14 and he hated it. He refused to convert to the Russian Orthodox Church - unlike Sophie, who converted and adopted a new name, Catherine, in 1744. A year later, the couple married in St. Petersburg. Recalling the wedding in her memoirs, Catherine stated that her "heart predicted but little happiness; ambition alone sustained me".

Catherine thought greatness awaited her. Instead, her husband turned out to be a drunk who played with toy soldiers like a child. They despised each other and their marriage went unconsummated for several years. But Catherine didn't want to waste her life and she told herself that she would become "the sovereign empress of Russia in [her] own right".

Feeling isolated and unloved, Catherine was getting desperate. After years of marriage there was no heir, Elizabeth was breathing down her neck, and the court was watching her every move. She started a series of affairs, firstly with Sergei Saltykov, a handsome court member. Elizabeth actually encouraged their relationship, hoping it would result in a pregnancy.

Catherine finally gave birth to a long-awaited heir, Paul, in 1754. The paternity is still debated today, but Catherine implied in her memoirs that Saltykov was the father, though possibly only to spite Peter. Regardless, she succeeded in her purpose and stabilised her position at court as the mother of the future emperor.

However, Catherine barely saw her baby as Elizabeth whisked him away and raised him herself. Catherine was devastated, and her affair with Saltykov ended when he was sent away, too. Meanwhile, Peter's behaviour became worrying. His wife, having fulfilled her duty, couldn't bear Russia crumbling in his insipid hands because he had failed to do his. She began to mastermind his downfall.

Elizabeth died in 1761 and Peter became Peter III. Catherine was now empress consort, but it wasn't enough – she wanted sole power. Support for her grew after Peter's childish behaviour at Elizabeth's funeral, where he created a game to alleviate his boredom. Taking advantage of this, Catherine openly grieved for the deceased empress, winning many admirers in the process.

Peter's behaviour was inexcusable. He skipped his own coronation and withdrew from the Seven Years' War – despite the fact Russia

Catherine fought for her power and refused to let it go was winning – returning all the land that they had conquered from Prussia. His actions disrespected those killed or injured during the conflict, alienating the army. Peter's contempt for the Church and his desire to wage war against Russia's long-time ally of Denmark exacerbated growing hatred towards him. He flaunted his mistress, Elizaveta Vorontsova, stating his desire to divorce Catherine and disinherit their son.

By April 1762, the situation was unbearable. Peter publicly humiliated Catherine at a state banquet by denouncing her as a fool, leaving her in tears. Whispers circulated that night that the emperor, incensed and drunk, had ordered his wife's arrest. Fortunately, Prince Georg Ludwig of Holstein, Catherine's uncle, managed to dissuade him from committing such an act. It was the final straw: Catherine knew that she and her son were now in grave danger.

The empress knew that if her coup was to succeed, she needed someone with influence by her side. She started an affair with Grigory Orlov, a lieutenant of the Izmailovsky Guards who had caught her eye the year before. Catherine had chosen her new lover wisely. Alongside his brother and fellow guard, Alexei, he had the political influence that she needed to sway the imperial guardsmen to her faction. Aside from the political benefits, the couple also fell deeply in love, and Orlov was determined to see his beloved on the Russian throne.

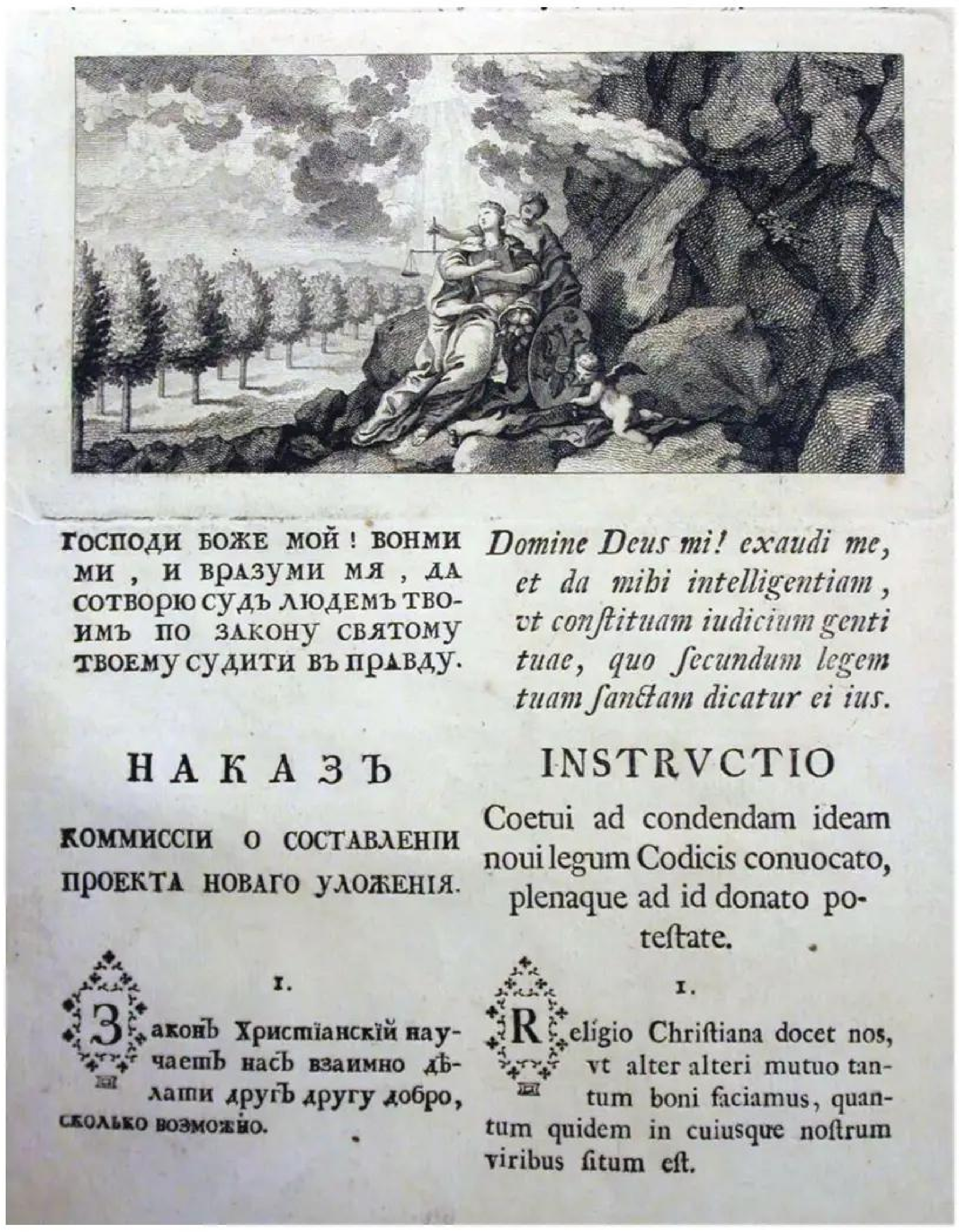
> *"Peter begged with his estranged wife, hoping to negotiate an escape… The answer was no"*

However, there was one obstacle that stopped Catherine from seizing power: she fell pregnant with Orlov's child. Previously, Catherine and Peter had been sleeping together infrequently and she could have claimed that he was the baby's father, however unlikely it may have seemed. But as communication between the two had practically stopped, there was no denying this secret liaison. Nobody could uncover the truth, lest it risk Catherine losing her valuable supporters. She managed to hide her pregnancy under voluminous dresses for months, fooling everyone around her. In April 1762, she secretly gave birth to a little boy who ended up being raised far away from court.

Peter soon left for Oranienbaum, Germany, to makes preparations for his looming fight against Denmark, while Catherine stayed at the nearby palace of Monplaisir. Her supporters prepared themselves; among them were the Orlov brothers, a number of guardsmen and Princess Dashkova, Elizaveta's sister. Even Nikita Panin, the politician entrusted as Paul's governor by Elizabeth, supported Catherine. With his control over her heir, Panin's backing was vital for the empress if she wanted the takeover to be seen as legitimate.

Peter ignored rumours of an impending coup, but a conspirator was arrested on 27 June. Fearing that she would be exposed, Catherine, barely dressed, climbed into a waiting carriage and rode straight to St. Petersburg in the early hours of 28 June. She headed to the barracks of her loyal guardsmen, visiting the Izmailovsky regiment first. The colonel of the regiment, Kirill Razumovsky, had loved Catherine for years. They pledged their allegiance to her and those who resisted were arrested. The usurper made her way to the Winter Palace to be sworn in as Russia's new ruler.

As for Peter, the seriousness of the situation sank in as he arrived at Monplaisir to find it abandoned. Despairing, he begged with his estranged wife, hoping to negotiate an escape to his native duchy of Holstein with Elizaveta. The answer was no. Peter fell into a drunken stupor while Catherine readied herself outside the Winter Palace, wearing the uniform of a male guard. Climbing onto her horse, it was time to arrest her husband.



ГОСПОДИ БОЖЕ МОЙ! ВОНМИ МИ, И ВРАЗУМИ МЯ, ДА СОТВОРЮ СУДЪ ЛЮДЕМЪ ТВОИМЪ ПО ЗАКОНУ СВЯТОМУ ТВОЕМУ СУДИТИ ВЪ ПРАВДУ.

Domine Deus mi! exaudi me, et da mihi intelligentiam, vt conſtituam iudicium genti tuae, quo ſecundum legem tuam ſanctam dicatur ei ius.

НАКАЗЪ

КОММИССІИ О СОСТАВЛЕНІИ ПРОЕКТА НОВАГО УЛОЖЕНІЯ.

INSTRVCTIO

Coetui ad condendam ideam noui legum Codicis conuocato, plenaque ad id donato poteſtate.

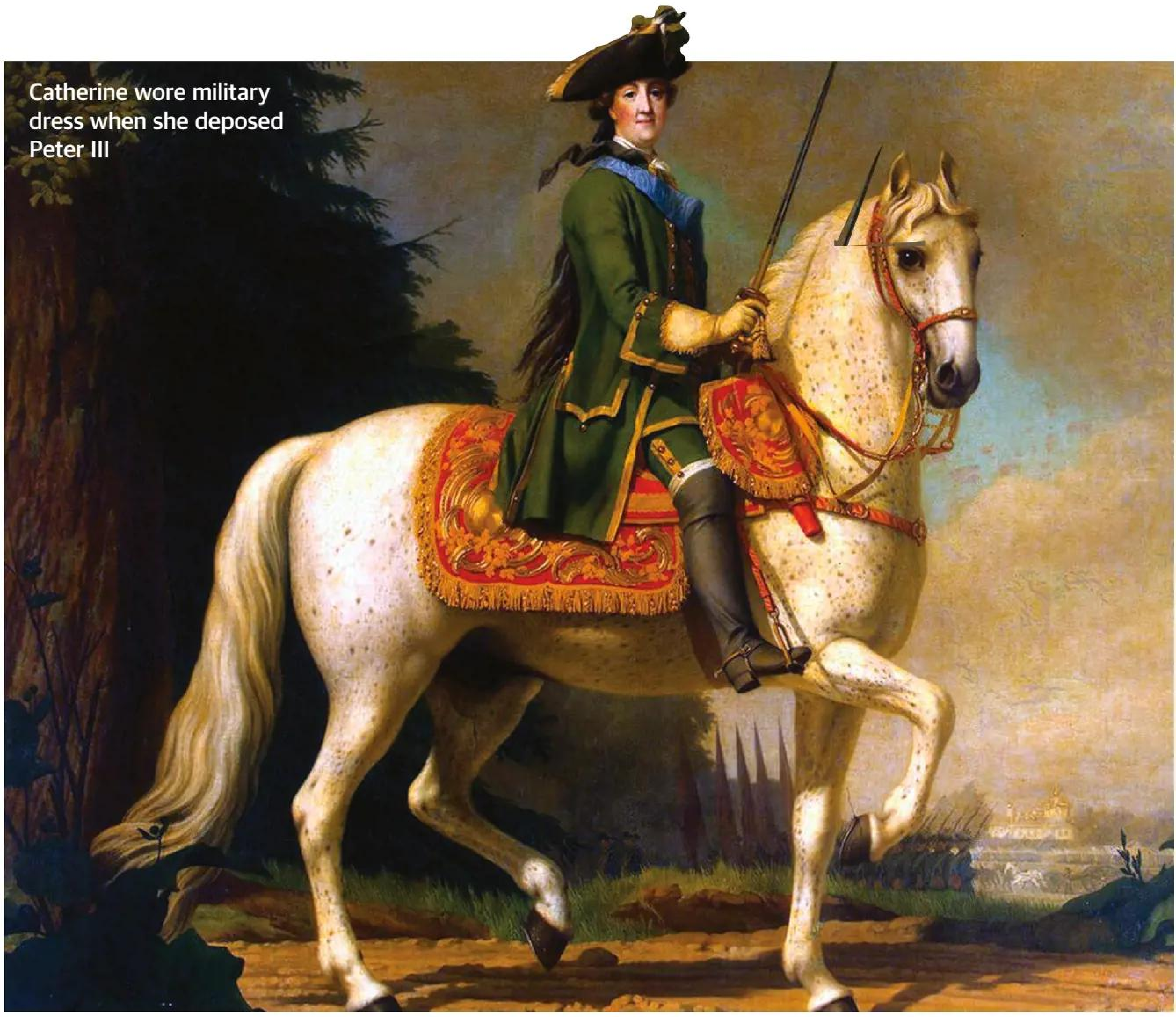
I.

Законъ Христіанскій научаетъ насъ взаимно дѣлати другъ другу добро, сколько возможно.

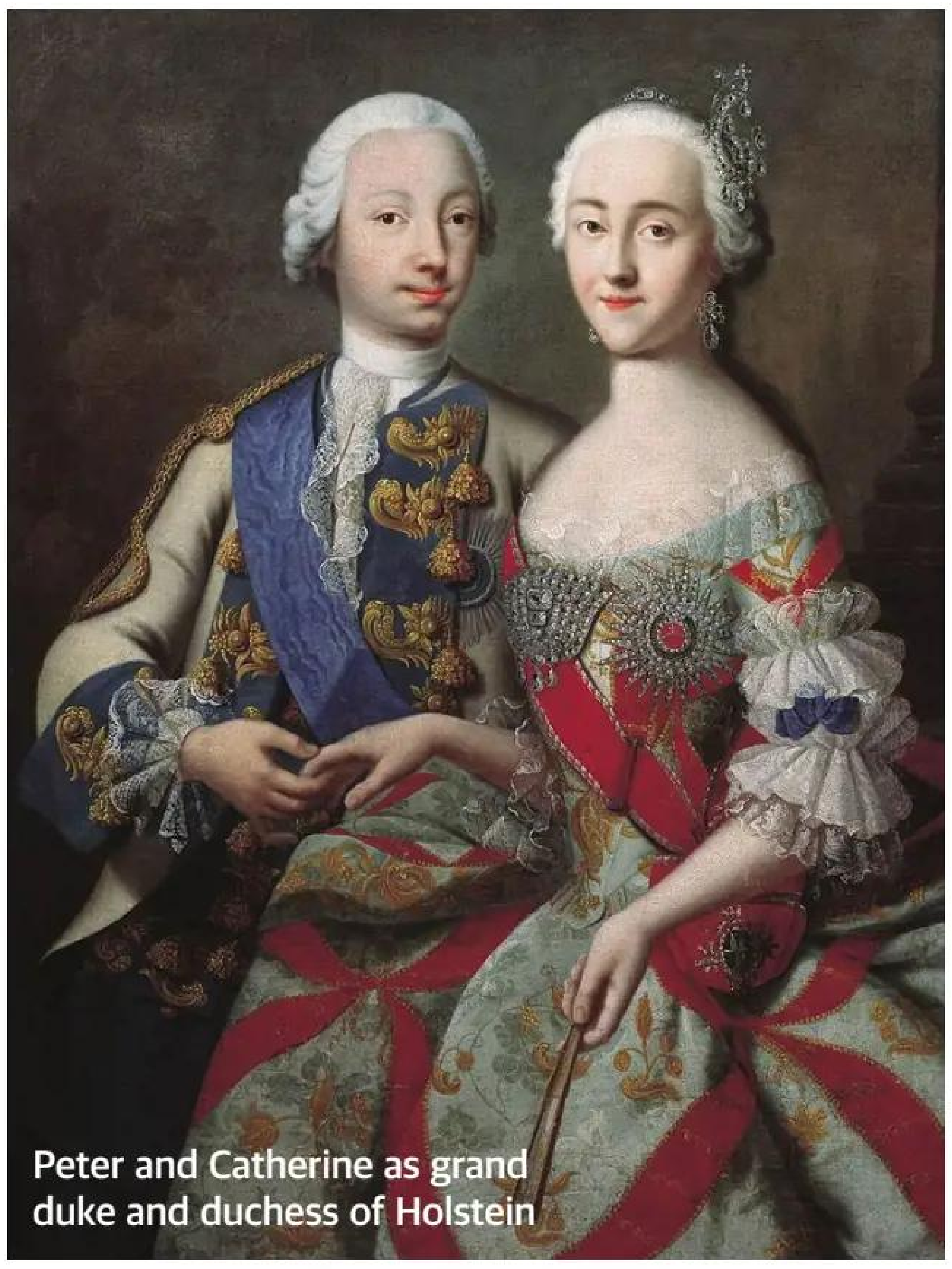
I.

Religio Chriſtiana docet nos, vt alter alteri mutuo tantum boni faciamus, quantum quidem in cuiusque noſtrum viribus ſitum eſt.

Nakaz ('Instruction') outlined Catherine's vision for Russia's future



Catherine wore military dress when she deposed Peter III


Peter and Catherine as grand duke and duchess of Holstein

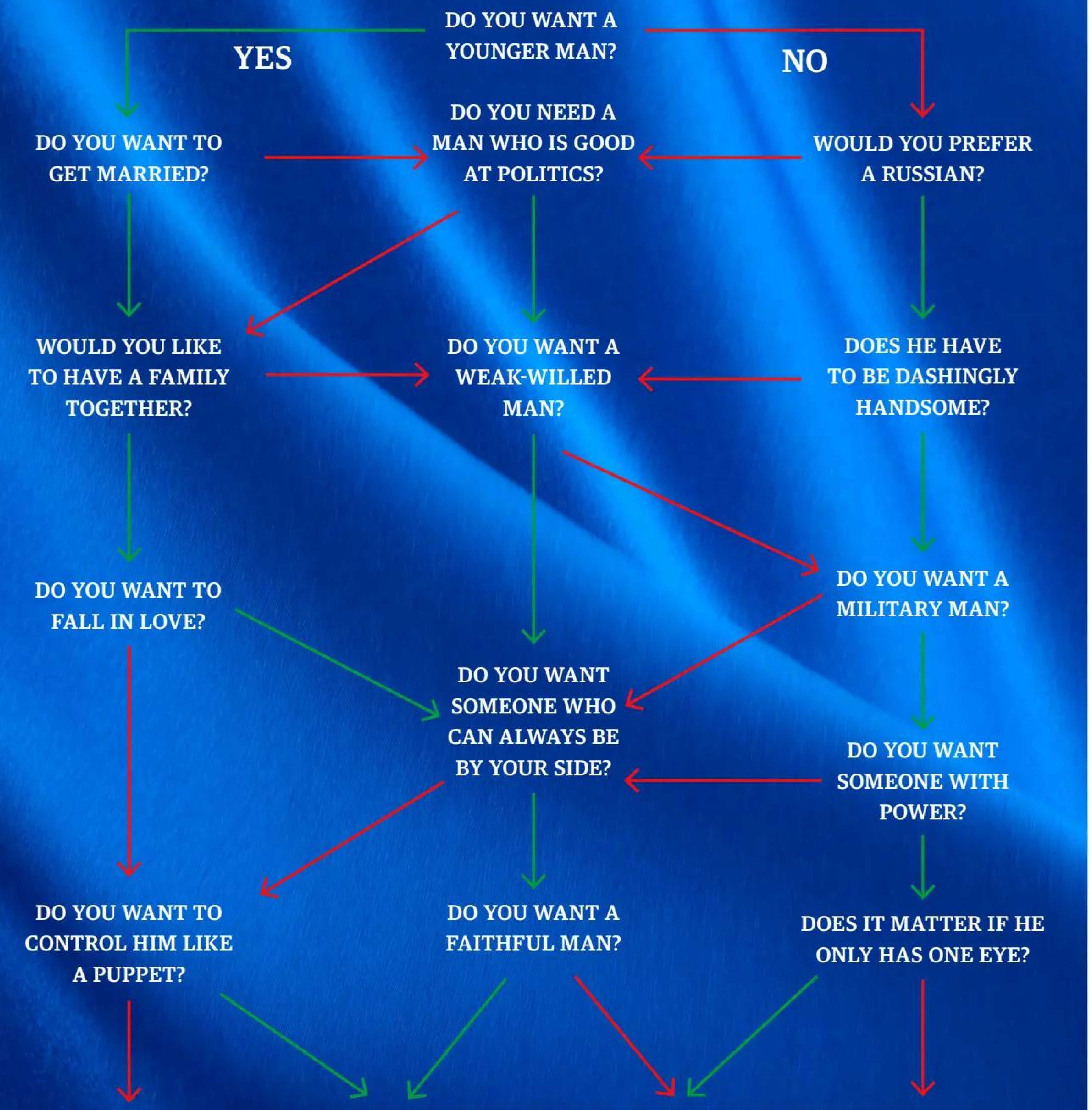
Word arrived of Peter's arrest and Catherine sent him a document of abdication, which he was forced to sign. Just over a week later, Peter was killed at Ropsha while in the custody of Alexei Orlov. Catherine waited a day before issuing a statement, claiming that Peter died of "a haemorrhoidal colic". But as Peter's body lay in state it was bloody and bruised, the hallmarks of strangulation likely committed by Alexei himself. When Alexei wrote to Catherine to inform her of Peter's illness, he stated ominously, "I fear that he might die tonight, but I fear even more that he might live through it."

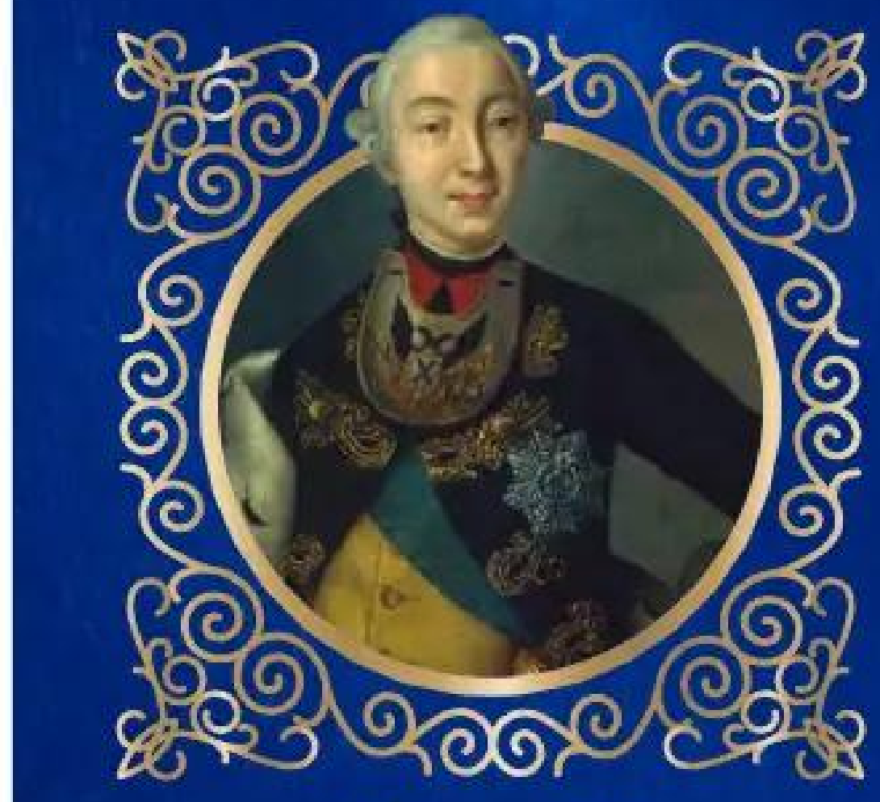
As suspicions arose that Catherine had committed regicide, she became nervous that her reign was already tainted. Was she involved in Peter's death? It couldn't be proven, but the fact that her position was now more secure because of his demise was beyond doubt. Catherine wanted sole, autocratic power, yet some of her co-conspirators, namely Panin and Dashkova, expected her to assume the regency on behalf of her young son. Catherine remained stubborn and was finally crowned in a sumptuous coronation in September 1762. Her message that she was in control came across loud and clear.

Catherine discovered the Enlightenment movement as a young girl and dreamed of modernising Russia. Conversing with some of the most famous French philosophers of the day, such as Voltaire and Diderot, Catherine had the opportunity to become the enlightened leader she craved to be. However, Russia was a complete mess. With a poor administrative system and a backwards economy, the country languished in the shadows of the other world powers. It needed a complete overhaul.

Date for an empress

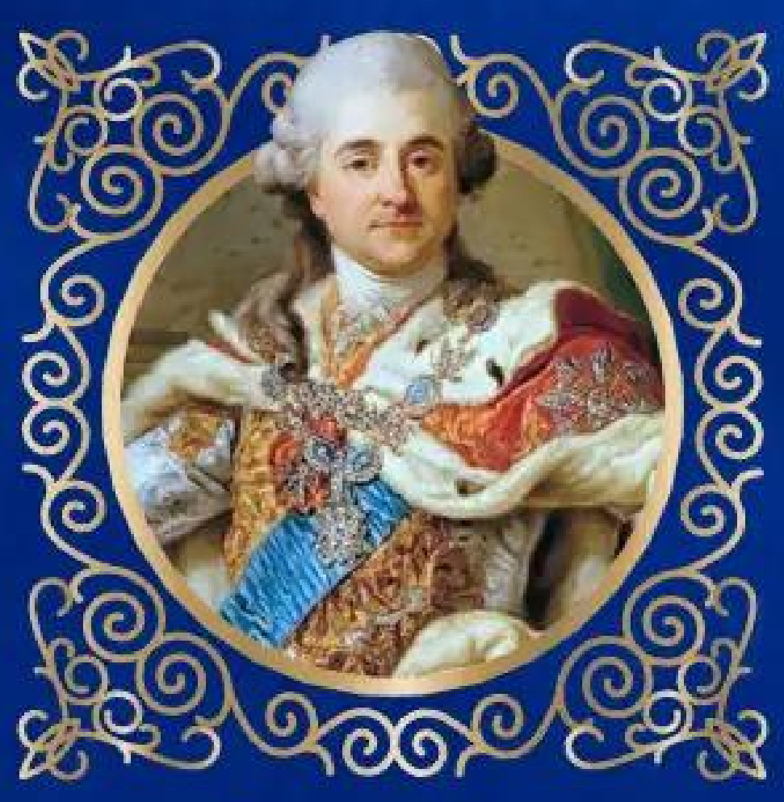
WHO IS THE PERFECT LOVER FOR CATHERINE THE GREAT?


DO YOU WANT A YOUNGER MAN?
YES
NO
DO YOU WANT TO GET MARRIED?
DO YOU NEED A MAN WHO IS GOOD AT POLITICS?
WOULD YOU PREFER A RUSSIAN?
WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE A FAMILY TOGETHER?
DO YOU WANT A WEAK-WILLED MAN?
DOES HE HAVE TO BE DASHINGLY HANDSOME?
DO YOU WANT TO FALL IN LOVE?
DO YOU WANT A MILITARY MAN?
DO YOU WANT SOMEONE WHO CAN ALWAYS BE BY YOUR SIDE?
DO YOU WANT SOMEONE WITH POWER?
DO YOU WANT TO CONTROL HIM LIKE A PUPPET?
DO YOU WANT A FAITHFUL MAN?
DOES IT MATTER IF HE ONLY HAS ONE EYE?



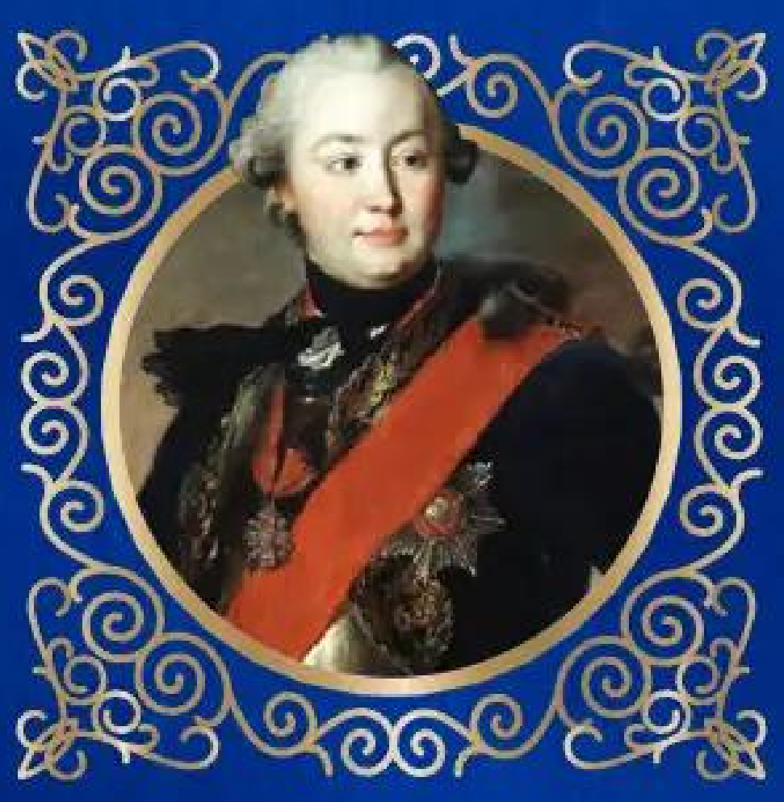
Peter III of Russia

Catherine's cold and childish husband hated his adopted country of Russia, managing to upset the army, the Church and the nobility just months into his reign. Catherine and Peter despised each other and he threatened to divorce his wife and replace her with his mistress. Catherine deposed her husband in 1762 and he died under suspicious circumstances.



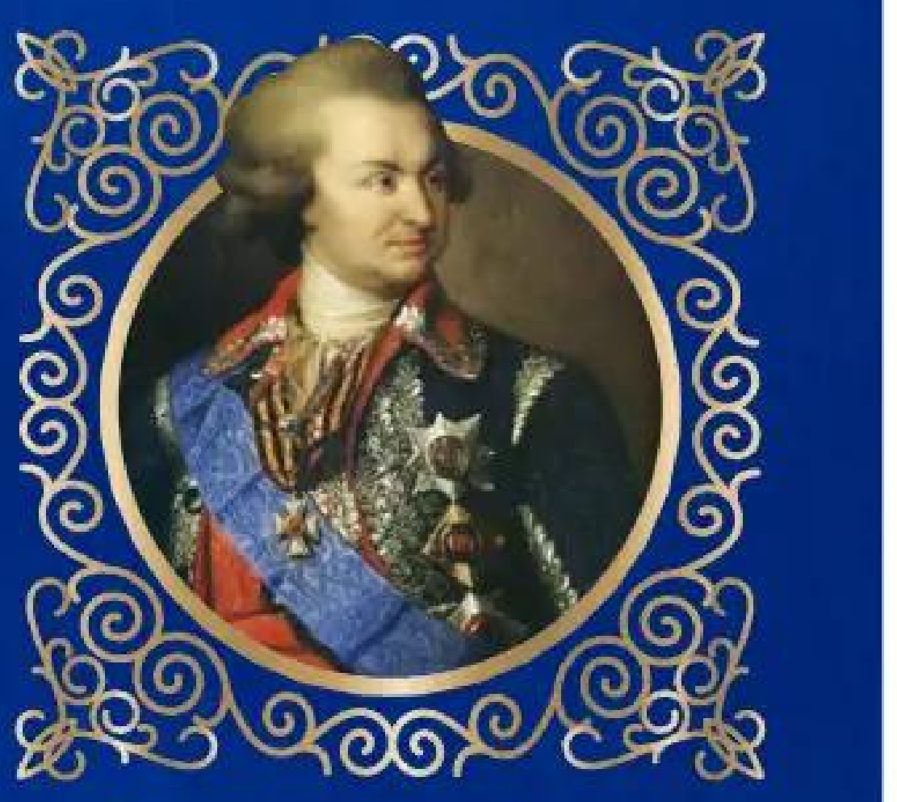
Stanisław Poniatowski

Catherine fell in love with Poniatowski while she was still a grand duchess and together they had an illegitimate daughter, Anna. Poniatowski was forced to leave the Russian court during the Seven Years' War and his affair with Catherine ended. They kept in contact, and with Catherine's support, Poniatowski was elected king of Poland, although she used him as a puppet.



Count Grigory Orlov

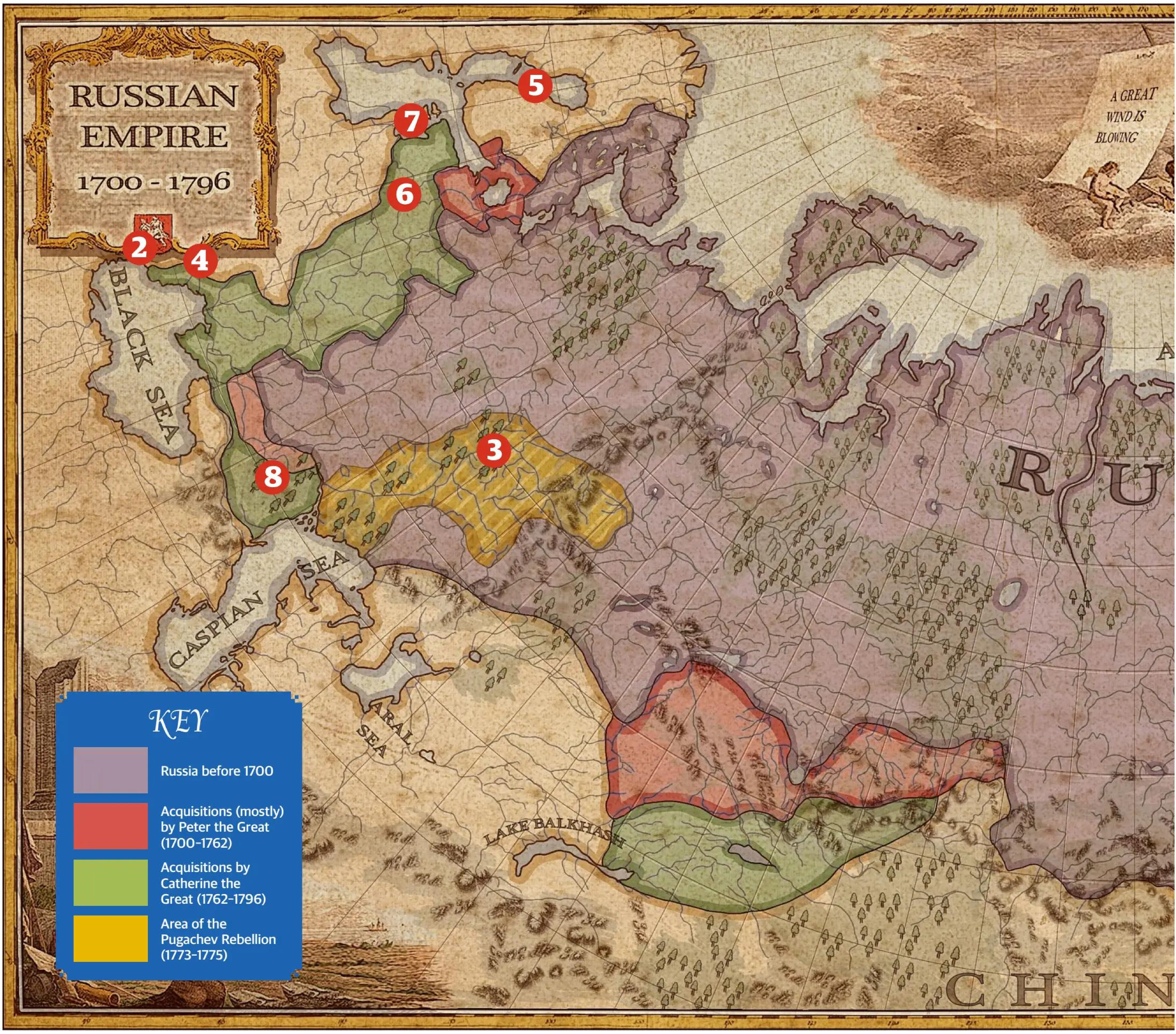
Orlov was Catherine's foremost supporter in her plot to overthrow her husband and played an instrumental role in the coup of 1762. He remained Catherine's favourite for over a decade and together they had an illegitimate son, Alexey. Orlov's downfall was guaranteed once she discovered his affairs with other women, and she banished him from the court.



Prince Grigory Potemkin

Catherine and Potemkin had a passionate – if short-lived – love affair. Just like Orlov, he supported Catherine during the coup and eventually succeeded him as her favourite. After their physical relationship ended, Potemkin remained by Catherine's side and was the most powerful man in her court for two decades before his early death at the age of 52.

Expansion of an empire


RUSSIAN EMPIRE
1700 - 1796
A GREAT WIND IS BLOWING
BLACK SEA
CASPIAN SEA
ARAL SEA
LAKE BALKHASH
RU
CHIN
2
4
5
6
7
3
8
KEY
Russia before 1700
Acquisitions (mostly) by Peter the Great (1700-1762)
Acquisitions by Catherine the Great (1762-1796)
Area of the Pugachev Rebellion (1773-1775)

1 *Alaska colonisation, 1766*

Catherine wrote to the governor of Siberia declaring the indigenous people of the Aleutian Islands and the Alaska Peninsula to be Russian subjects. She instructed the Russian fur-traders to treat their new fellow subjects well. After this, tax collectors accompanied Russian fur-hunters on their voyages to Alaska and the government licensed fur-hunting expeditions.

2 *First Russo-Turkish War, 1768-74*

The first in a series of wars between Russia and the Ottoman Empire was sparked by a conflict over borders. Catherine's victory led to Russia expanding its influence in Europe and gaining territory in modern-day Ukraine. The Turks were forced to accept the Crimean Khanate's independence, providing an opportunity for Catherine to annex it later on.

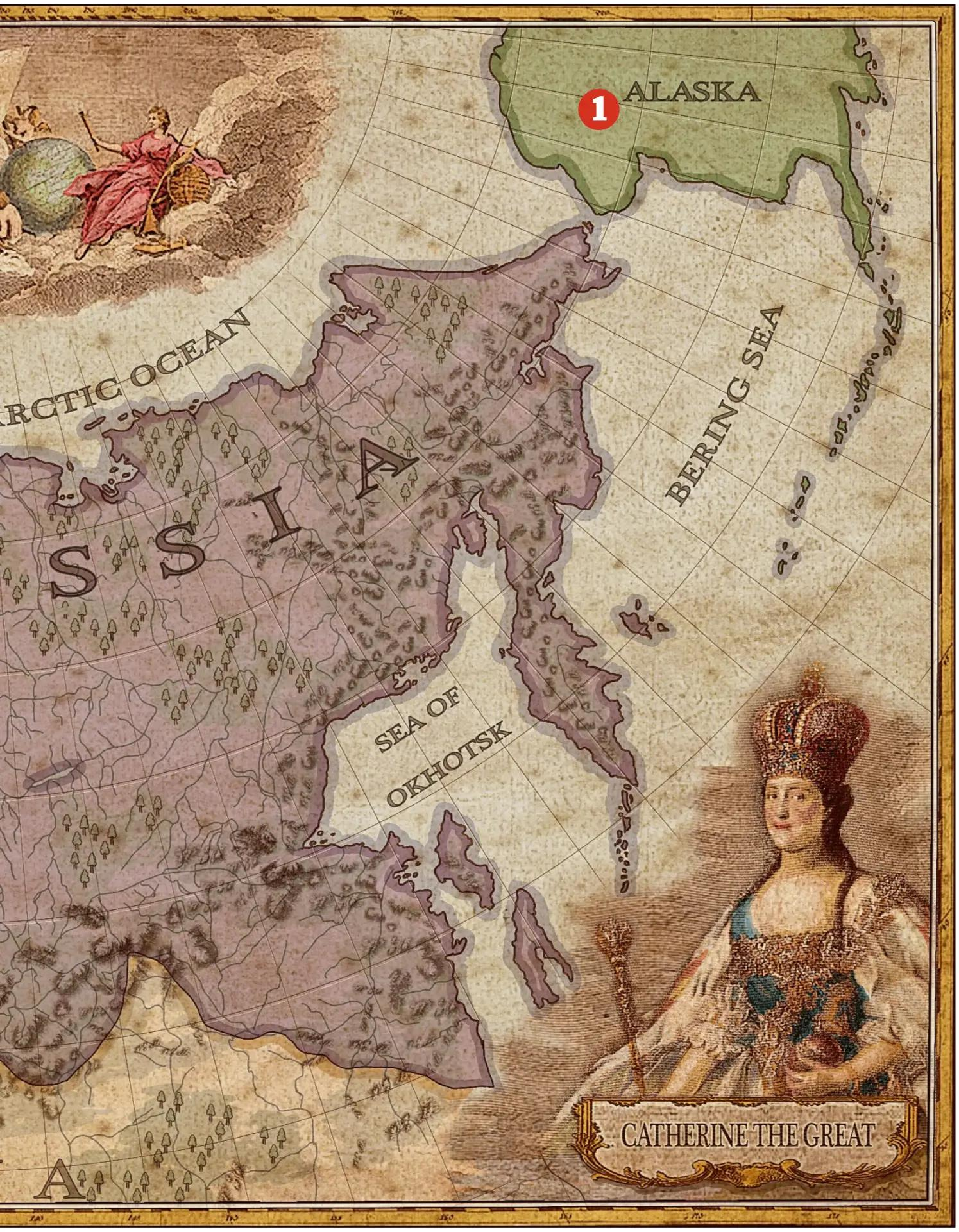
3 *Pugachev's Rebellion, 1773-75*

After Catherine usurped the throne, she faced a number of rebellions from pretenders, with the most serious revolt led by a Cossack, Yemelyan Pugachev. He claimed to be the deceased Peter III and his rebellion gathered pace as the government failed to see it as a legitimate threat. Catherine eventually had it brutally suppressed, leaving thousands of rebels dead.

4 *Second Russo-Turkish War, 1787-92*

Still reeling from their defeat 13 years earlier, the Ottoman Empire declared war on Russia once again. It attempted to regain the territory that it had previously lost to Russia but instead suffered a decisive defeat. Following the Treaty of Jassy in 1792, the Turks were forced to accept Russia's annexation of Crimea, which had occurred in 1783.

HOW CATHERINE EXTENDED RUSSIAN TERRITORY



Catherine wanted to introduce a better education system, build new cities, develop Russian culture and possibly abolish serfdom. She wrote the *Nakaz*, also known as the *Great Instruction*, a momentous piece that took her two years to complete. It was inspired by the principles of Western philosophers and formed Catherine's idea of the perfect government. She presented it to the Legislative Commission, assembled in 1767, which consisted of approximately 500 people, all from different classes of society. On the surface it advertised Enlightenment thinking as a way to revitalise Russia, but in reality it reinforced Catherine's belief in absolutist monarchy.

The Commission failed to achieve anything before it was disbanded in 1768. It embodied the hypocrisy that Catherine would peddle throughout her reign; she wanted to be perceived around the world as an enlightened leader, but the truth was a very different story. The obvious example is the issue of serfdom. At one time, Catherine may have considered reforming or abolishing serfdom in the Russian Empire altogether, but the economy depended too heavily on the workforce, who belonged to the aristocracy, and Catherine ultimately relied on the nobles for support. Consequently, apart from slightly improving the rights of serfs, Catherine actually did nothing to improve their situation throughout her reign.

Nevertheless, she did accomplish some of her goals. She was committed to improving education in Russia to bring it in line with the West, and alongside new towns and cities, she founded academies, libraries and schools across her vast empire. For the first time, free schooling became available for all children – except serfs – and the curriculum became standardised. Furthermore, Catherine championed education for women and even established the Smolny Institute for young noble girls, the first of its kind, in St. Petersburg in 1764.

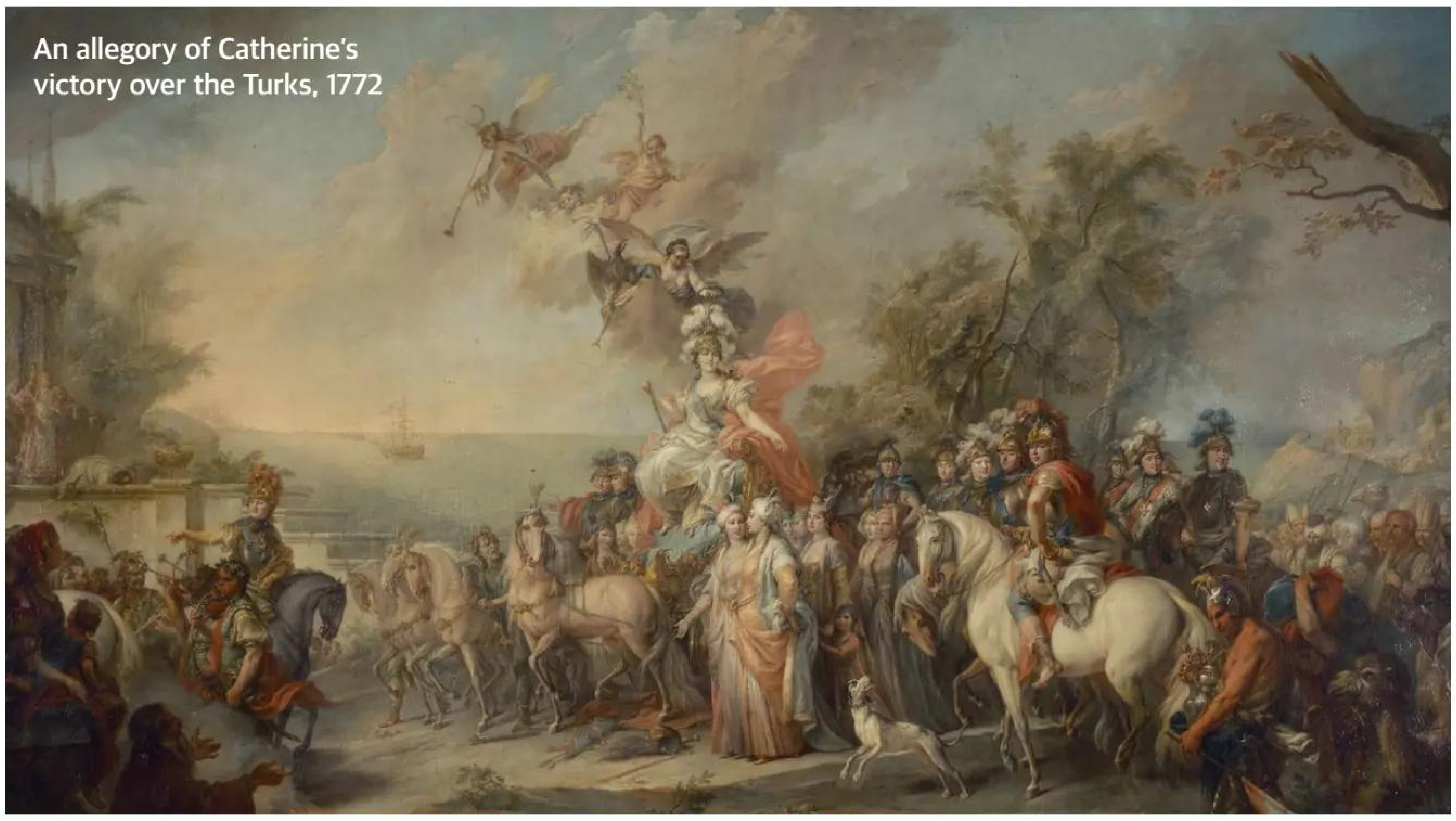
As a fierce patron of the arts, her personal collection of artwork was the largest in Europe at the time. Having amassed thousands of masterpieces, she founded the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg in 1764, and it is still a museum of art and culture today, open to the public since 1852. She also imported Western literature and encouraged the arrival of foreign artists and architects to improve Russia

5 ***Russo-Swedish War, 1788-90***
The Ottoman Empire formed an alliance with Gustav III of Sweden against Catherine, his cousin. Gustav wanted to depose her, hoping that it would bolster his popularity in Sweden, but despite some success the war racked up some serious debt. As for Catherine, she gained nothing from the conflict and wanted to reach peace deal, which was concluded in 1790 with the Treaty of Värälä.

6 ***Polish-Russian War, 1792***
War broke out in Poland between the anti-Russian, pro-reform Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the anti-reform Targowica Confederation. The latter was supported by Catherine, angered by a new alliance between the Commonwealth and Prussia made in an attempt to stop Russian interference in Poland. Poniatowski believed Russia would eventually win and sought a ceasefire.

7 ***Kościuszko Uprising, March 1794***
Following the first and second partitions of Poland, there was a popular uprising against Russian control. Following Russian demands that the Polish downsize their army, the supreme commander, Tadeusz Kościuszko, led a rebellion. He was captured seven months later and the revolt was repressed, leading to the third and final partition of Poland in 1795.

8 ***Russo-Persian War, 1796***
The last war of Catherine's lifetime, Russia went to war against Persia after the latter invaded Georgia – a country that Russia had sworn to protect – in 1795. Russia hoped to depose the shah, Āghā Mohammad Khān, who hated Russia, and replace him with someone more amenable. Initially, Catherine's armies were winning, but following her death, her successor, Paul, withdrew the Russian troops.



An allegory of Catherine's victory over the Turks, 1772

culturally. A woman on a mission, the empress even sent Russian academics abroad to learn the ways of Western culture and society and disseminate them back in the motherland.

As for foreign affairs, Catherine took massive strides in comparison to her predecessors. She patronised her former lovers with titles, money and power throughout her reign. However, there was one that she went the extra mile for: Stanisław Poniatowski. They had engaged in an affair back in 1755, when he was the Polish secretary to the British envoy in Russia, but it had ended after Poniatowski was forced to leave during the Seven Years' War, which pitched Russia against British-backed Prussia. He had hoped to reignite their romance, but Catherine knew this was too dangerous and told him, "You are likely to get us both slaughtered."

Instead, when the Polish throne became vacant in 1763, Catherine promised it to Poniatowski. It was the perfect chance to expand her empire and he was elected under the threat of the Russian military in 1764. Straight away Poniatowski attempted to pass a series of reforms that weren't part of Catherine's plan. She needed Poland to remain a weak protectorate and her former lover was supposed to be her puppet, not a lone wolf. When rebellion broke out in Poland in 1768, partly in reaction to Russian influence in the country, Catherine invaded under the pretence of restoring control.

Her dominance over Poland concerned Prussia, Austria and, in particular, the Ottoman Empire, which suffered a series of defeats at her hands during the ongoing Russo-Turkish War that had also broken out in 1768. These losses shifted the European balance of power in Russia's favour, no doubt to Catherine's delight. However, the arrival of bubonic plague in Moscow between 1770 and 1772 and the resulting riots pushed Catherine into seeking a truce as a reprieve.

To rebalance the power in Europe, Russia, Austria and Prussia all agreed as neighbours of Poland to partition the country among themselves, without ever thinking of discussing it with the Polish king. As a result, Catherine gained around 92,000 square kilometres (35,500 square miles) of territory for her empire – almost the size of modern-day Portugal. It was the first of three partitions of Poland, which led to Poniatowski's downfall in 1795, just a year before Catherine's death. He spent his final years in Russia surviving on a pension that was provided by the empress.

Following Catherine's victory over the Turks in the Russo-Turkish War in 1774, tensions were high with the Ottoman Empire. With the territory she gained she established a province to the south of Russia, known as New Russia (now part of modern-day Ukraine). When she annexed Crimea in 1783, a former Turkish territory, a second conflict broke out. This war, fought from 1787 to 1792, saw the Turks heavily defeated again and Catherine's authority over Crimea secured. It was one of the greatest military achievements of her reign.

During the trouble with Poland and the first Turkish war, Orlov continued to dominate the court as Catherine's lover. During the decade since the coup, Orlov was rewarded with lands and titles and is credited for dealing with the Moscow plague riots. Catherine considered marrying him, until she realised that such a

Enlightenment pen pals

CATHERINE CORRESPONDED WITH MANY OF THE GREAT MINDS OF HER DAY

Voltaire

Catherine and the French philosopher Voltaire never met but wrote to each other for years. While Voltaire is famous for savaging the French monarchy for its extravagance, he approved of Catherine's role as an 'enlightened despot', nicknaming her the 'Star of the North'. Some have interpreted Catherine's side of the correspondence as a public relations exercise, casting her in a more positive light in Europe, but she had been an enthusiastic reader of Voltaire since she was a princess, so no doubt she was flattered to correspond with one of her adolescent idols.

Baron von Grimm

Friedrich Melchior, Baron von Grimm, hung out in Paris' progressive literary circle thanks to his acquaintance with Jean-Jacques Rousseau. He wrote a cultural newsletter for foreign sovereigns and nobility that were keen to keep up with 18th-century French fashions. However, Catherine and Grimm also kept up a personal correspondence for 26 years. Grimm fed her tidbits about what was going on in European courts while she patronised some of Grimm's preferred architects. Despite both being of German descent, the pair always wrote to one another in fluent French.

Denis Diderot

Another French thinker, Diderot is best known for co-founding and heavily contributing to the *Encyclopédie*, the definitive work of Enlightenment thought. When the empress heard that he was in need of money she offered to buy his library. She also appointed him caretaker of it until he died and paid him a 25-year salary in advance. Diderot felt obliged to thank her in person in 1773, but the trip was mired when he tried to lecture her on the best way to govern Russia. Though Catherine dressed him down for this she continued to patronise Diderot until his death in 1784.

move was far too controversial. Despite concern about Orlov's power, he held no sway over Catherine. She knew that he was too politically inept to deal with such matters, choosing to consult Panin instead.

Orlov's relationship with Catherine sparked intrigue and jealously from others, especially Panin, and by 1771 he was plotting his rival's downfall. His scheming paid off as Catherine was made aware of Orlov's various infidelities. Angered and heartbroken, she sent Orlov away from court, never to regain her favour.

During her relationship with Orlov, Catherine became close to Grigory Potemkin. Their love story is infamous but not straightforward. They met on the night of the coup and Catherine rewarded him for his loyalty by promoting him to gentleman of the bedchamber, a position that allowed them to meet frequently. Potemkin had loved Catherine ever since, and unlike the other men at court, he wasn't afraid of Orlov.

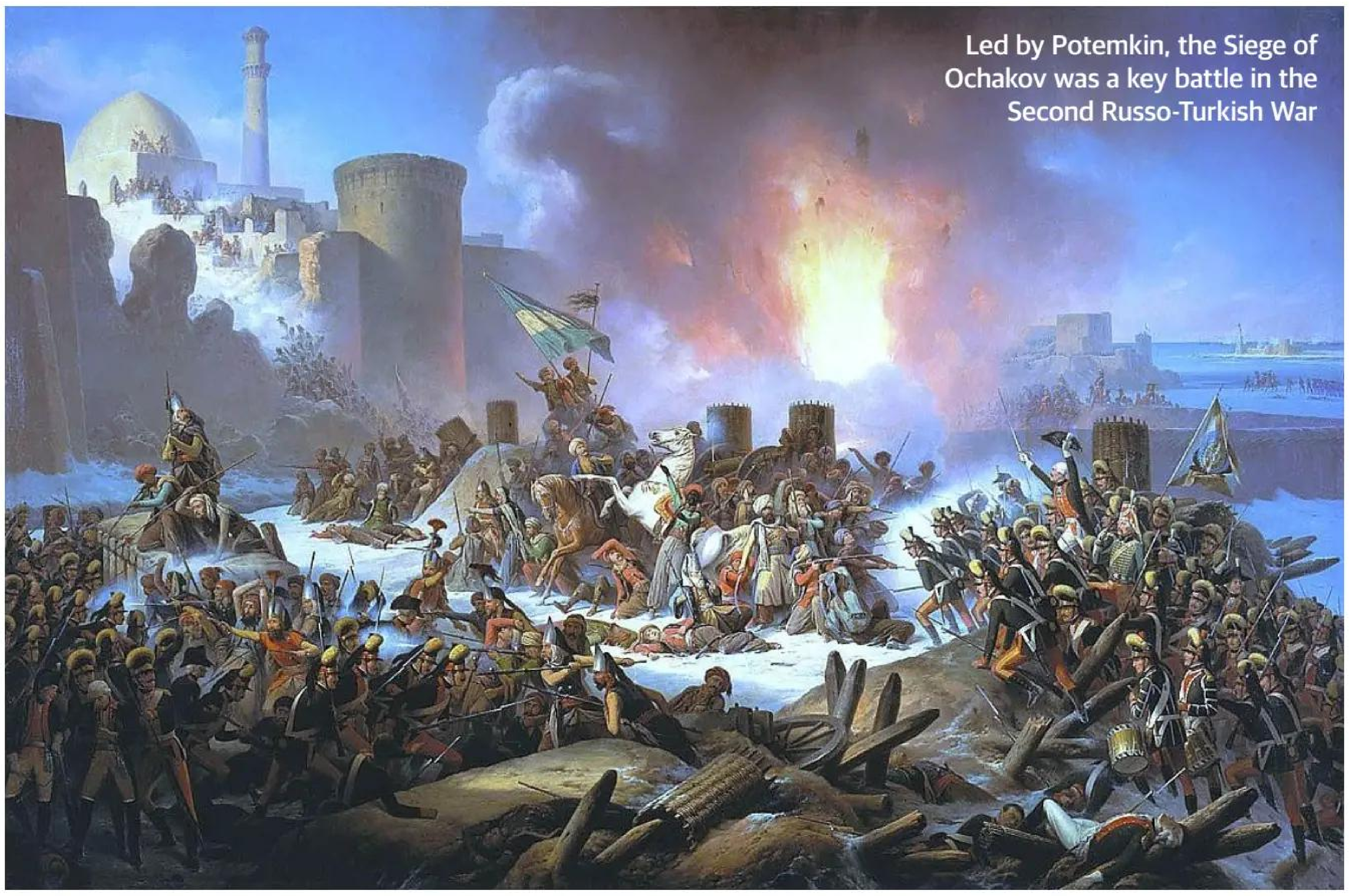
Potemkin was bold, openly declaring his love for Catherine at every opportunity. She enjoyed his attention but was too hesitant to pursue anything, perhaps because of Orlov. However, she didn't discourage Potemkin and, seeing his potential, began to forge him a career in politics – the start of his dramatic rise within the court.

After suffering a severe eye injury, Potemkin suddenly left the court. Catherine missed him terribly, and after 18 months she demanded his return in 1767. She appointed him as an army paymaster before promoting him as the guardian of exotic peoples for her Legislative Commission, a politically important role. When the First Russo-Turkish War broke out, Potemkin was desperate to go to the front and Catherine allowed it, though she longed for his return.

After Orlov's dismissal, Catherine distracted herself with a new, younger lover, Alexander Vasilchikov, much to Potemkin's disappointment when he briefly returned in 1772. However, Catherine's interest in Vasilchikov faded quickly, although she compensated him with a sizeable pension and lands. Instead, her thoughts turned back to Potemkin, now a war hero thanks to his military success abroad.

When Potemkin disappeared from court again at the start of 1774, Catherine finally accepted their love. He returned and their affair started, with Catherine in her mid-40s and Potemkin a decade younger. With his military experience he was a useful advisor and the first of her lovers with whom Catherine chose to share her power. She bestowed upon him a number of military and political promotions, including governor-general of New Russia, which granted him absolute power over the region.

The couple's numerous love letters to one another indicate that they secretly married. In a letter to Potemkin, Catherine refers to him as "my dear, sweet angel, my very own friend, my husband," and in another tells him that she'll "remain [his] true wife to the grave". Whether they actually married is uncertain, but considering the nature of the letters and Potemkin's influence at court, it is a possibility.



Led by Potemkin, the Siege of Ochakov was a key battle in the Second Russo-Turkish War

Unfortunately, their great love affair didn't last. Catherine and Potemkin were both passionate but, plagued with jealousies and insecurities, their relationship mutually cooled. By 1775, Catherine had a new favourite, but unlike her previous lovers, Potemkin retained his position of personal and political influence over her for the rest of his life. In fact, he held so much control that rumours swirled that he procured new lovers for Catherine.

Scandalous gossip also spread that the empress' lovers were vetted for their bedroom skills by one of her ladies-in-waiting before she slept with them. This was likely baseless slander but Catherine's love for men was well known. Her sexuality became the focus of lewd jokes and crude satires designed to criticise her in Russia and further afield in Europe. Potemkin's influence over her was also subject to such attacks, causing cracks in her image as an absolute ruler. Her vice was exposed – but Catherine was no less powerful as a result and neither was she ashamed.

While Potemkin was abroad as commander-in-chief during the Second Russo-Turkish War, Catherine caught sight of a vain young officer, Platon Zubov. At 22 years old, he was almost four decades younger than the empress, who at that point had turned 60. Their affair began in 1789 and Catherine loved him deeply. She relied on him, perhaps because of her advanced age, and Zubov rose far quicker than any of her previous lovers. However, the toy boy nature of this relationship once again opened the aging empress up to sexual ridicule.

Catherine's happiness was hampered by the arrival of tragic news in October 1791. Potemkin had passed away abroad while negotiating a peace treaty with the Turks after days of suffering with fever and symptoms of pneumonia. Catherine was distraught. For the past two decades he had been her pillar of strength, and now she had to cope without him.

For the last five years of her life the empress lavished her attention on Zubov. He played a crucial role in making decisions during her reign, leaving him envied and despised by a court that couldn't understand Catherine's infatuation with him. Zubov even managed to convince the empress to give his brother command over her army in the Russo-Persian conflict, which began in April 1796, instead of a seasoned general. Although it turned out to be a good decision, with the younger Zubov returning in victorious glory, there is no denying that this was a different ruler to the one who had usurped the throne three decades earlier.

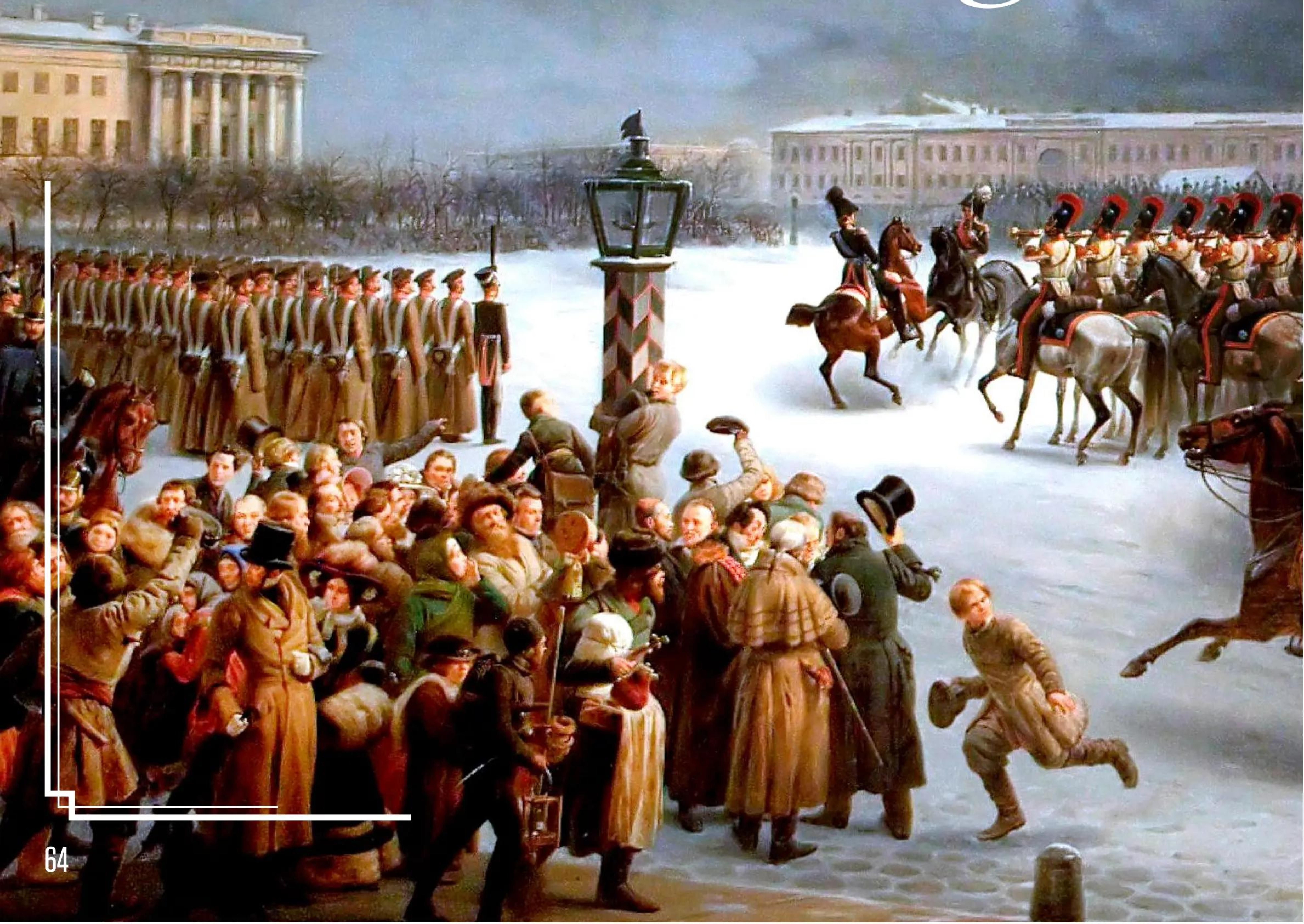
But Catherine never saw the outcome as she passed away in November 1796. Perverse stories of her unbridled sexuality surfaced, aimed at destroying her legacy and reputation. The most famous one claimed that she had died after engaging in bestiality with a stallion, which crushed her when its supporting harness snapped. The reality is actually far less vulgar – Catherine collapsed following a stroke, never to regain consciousness.

It was an uneventful end for an unabashedly colourful woman who will always be remembered as Catherine the Great.

A cold December morning in St. Petersburg

THE DECEMBRIST CONSPIRATORS SOUGHT REFORM THROUGH REBELLION, BUT THEIR DREAMS WERE BRUTALLY SUPPRESSED

Written by Marc DeSantis



By the end of 1812, Tsar Alexander I (b. 1777) of the Romanov dynasty had crushed French Emperor Napoleon's invasion of Russia. In two-and-a-half years' time Napoleon would be defeated for good at Waterloo. Sitting in Paris, France's lovely capital, it was natural for Russia's soldiers to think that they had won a grand victory.

But the homeland to which Russian Army officers returned after their stay in France was scarcely like what they found in Western Europe. Though vast, it was woefully underdeveloped: politically, economically, and socially. Many younger Russian officers wished to erase the gulf that lay between Russia and the West. As it would turn out, even some of the members of Alexander's own Imperial Guards held radical ideas for reform. The tsar's death from typhoid on 19 November 1825, without issue, in Taganrog on the Sea of Azov, provided reform-minded officers with the opportunity to force change on Russia.

SUCCESSION CRISIS

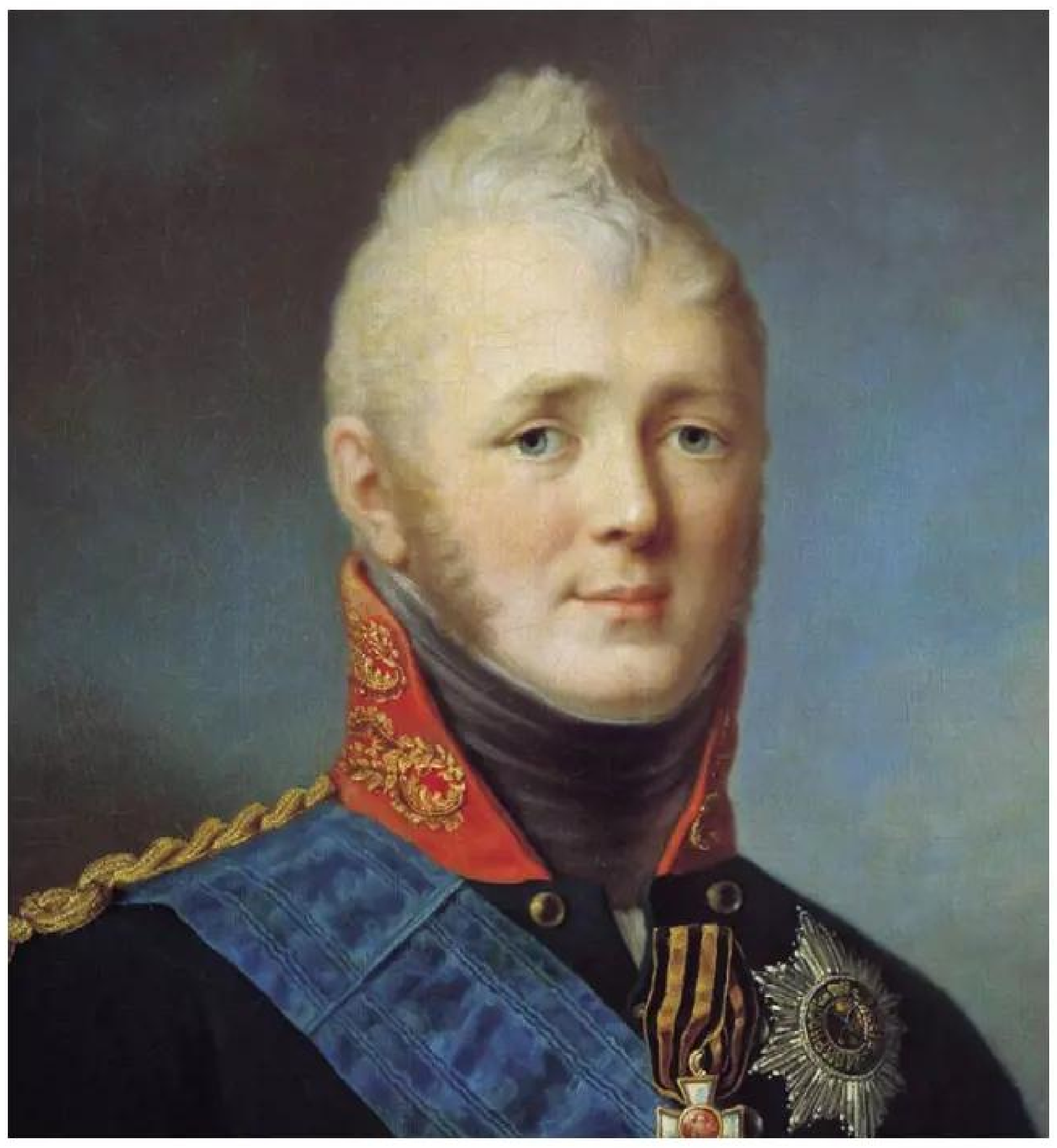
In the imperial capital of St. Petersburg, Nicholas (b. 1796), Alexander's second younger brother (and thus second-in-line) had quickly sworn fealty to his older brother Constantine (b. 1779) upon Alexander I's passing on the natural presumption that Constantine was now to be tsar. However, Constantine wanted nothing to do with becoming tsar, no matter where he stood in the Romanov line of inheritance.

Complicating matters further, Constantine was at this time residing in Warsaw, Poland, not St. Petersburg. This meant that the presumed heir for the throne was not present in the Russian capital to publicly renounce his claim to the throne. Constantine's refusal of the crown had shocked Nicholas when he had discovered that his older brother had created a secret manifesto that made him his heir, as he had no interest in being tsar, either.

Further, Alexander I too had created his own secret manifesto, which had also not been made known to Nicholas, that bypassed Constantine and made Nicholas heir. This put Nicholas in a bind when he learned of it, as he had already sworn his oath of loyalty to Constantine. But duty called. Once Constantine's renunciation became known to him, he fully intended to ascend the throne as Tsar Nicholas I.

Image source: Alamy

"The gunners blasted the rebels with grapeshot, this being a hail of iron balls spewed from a cannon mouth"



Tsar Alexander's decision to make Nicholas his heir led to a succession crisis that ended in bloodshed

He asked Constantine to come to St. Petersburg to demonstrate that his own assumption of the throne was legitimate, but Constantine would not stir himself from Warsaw. Making matters worse, Constantine would not publicly renounce the throne, which would have eased matters for Nicholas, who did not wish to appear to be a usurper.

After weeks had passed with the throne vacant, Nicholas could wait no longer. The empire could not be left without a tsar for such an extended time. On the evening of 13 December (25 December according to the New Style, or Gregorian, calendar, which Russia didn't adopt until 1918) he called together the State Council and asked them to swear loyalty to him. If they did not, then on the next day, he warned, he would command them to do so.

INSURGENTS IN THE CAPITAL

Sprinkled among the officer corps of the Russian Army were a number of insurgents who saw the current crisis as an opportunity to achieve their goals of radical reform. The rebels were broadly split into two major groups: the Northern Society, and the Southern Society, based in Ukraine. These were outgrowths of earlier groups such as the Union of Salvation (1816–1818), and the Union of Welfare, existing from 1818–1821. Many of the young insurgent officers, devotees of Alexander during the death struggle against Napoleon, had once looked to the tsar as the person most capable of reforming the empire, but they had become extremely unhappy with him when the Russian constitution that they hoped for was not created.

Since there was no way forward with the tsar unwilling to do what was necessary to save Russia from the problems that ailed it, they turned conspiratorial. The stage was now set for an attempted coup by these disgruntled Guards officers in St. Petersburg during this period of confused succession. They would use the Guards themselves, present in the capital, to enforce reform.

What did the conspirators want? Their goals were not modest: they sought the abolition of the tsardom; a constitution for Russia modelled on that of the United States; and the redistribution of land to Russia's peasants. These aims would only be achievable if their plot succeeded, but the odds against them were long.

On the night of 13 December, the Northern Society rebels set their plan in motion, naming their leading figure, Sergei Trubetskoy, who was himself sceptical of its success, as 'dictator'. But Nicholas had been made aware through his own agents that some plot was afoot, with arrests having been made among Southern Society plotters in the army in Ukraine. Word had thereby reached Nicholas' ears in St. Petersburg by the 12th, and he was not taken completely by surprise. The conspirators themselves already knew of this security breach, and so their hands had been forced. They had to act quickly.

The insurgent cause was hopeless from the outset. Though they were physically near to the tsar, they numbered a mere 3,000, while they would be opposed by some 9,000 men loyal to Nicholas. Additionally, the tsar's Guards were not a single body of troops but instead comprised several units. While the conspirators were relatively well-represented in the Moskovsky Regiment, the Marine Guards, and the Grenadier Life Guards, there were few in the other Guards units.

Further, many of the so-called rebel Guards had been lied to by their officers, who had told the common soldiers that, far from renouncing the throne, Constantine was being held captive along the route to the capital from Warsaw and that they must not swear their loyalty to the usurping Nicholas.

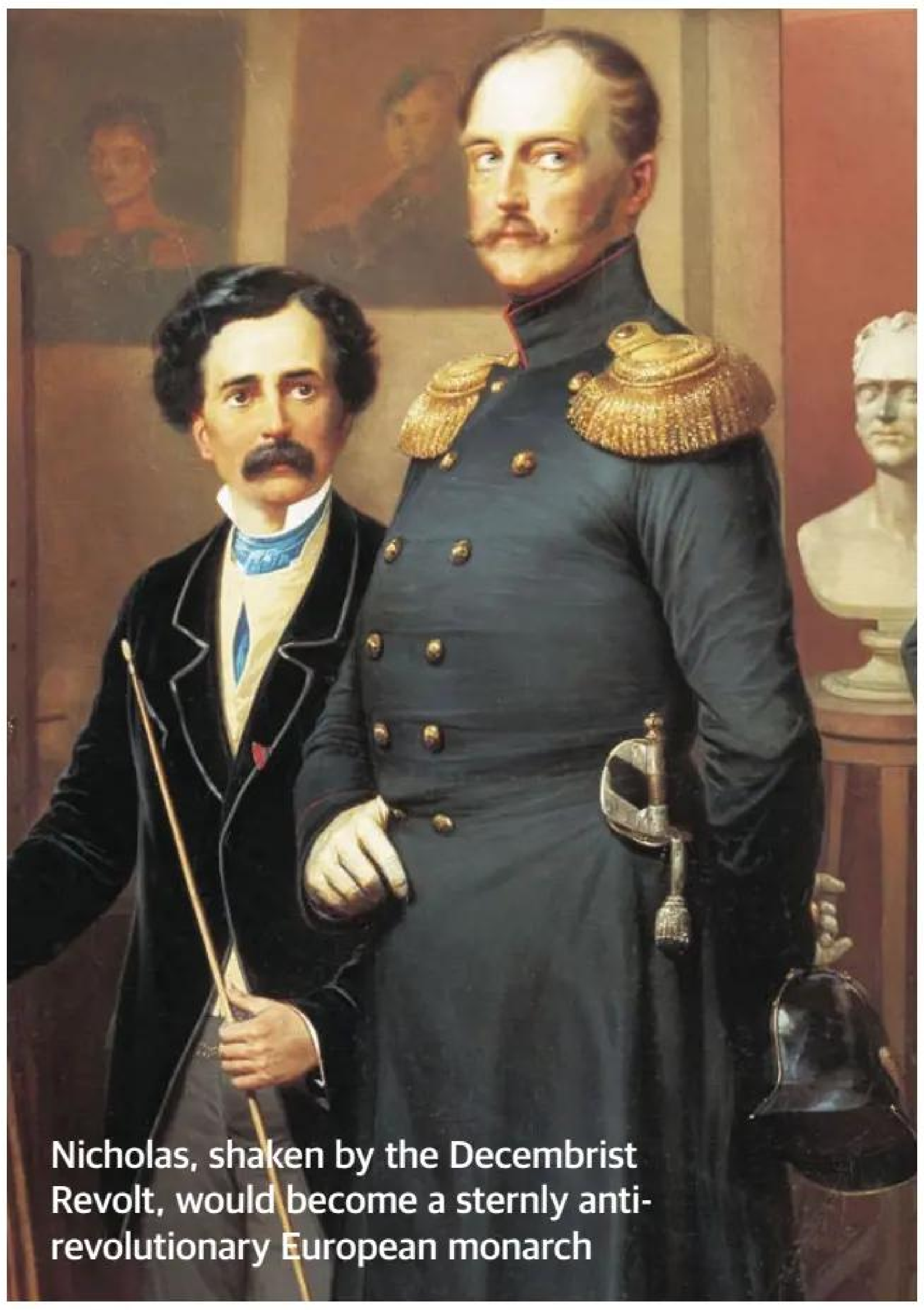
14 DECEMBER 1825

The focus of the 'Decembrist' revolt, as the rebels were later-called, was the Senate Square, where the Moskovskii Regiment, with a strength of 700 men, formed with loaded weapons on the subfreezing morning of 14 (26 N.S.) December.

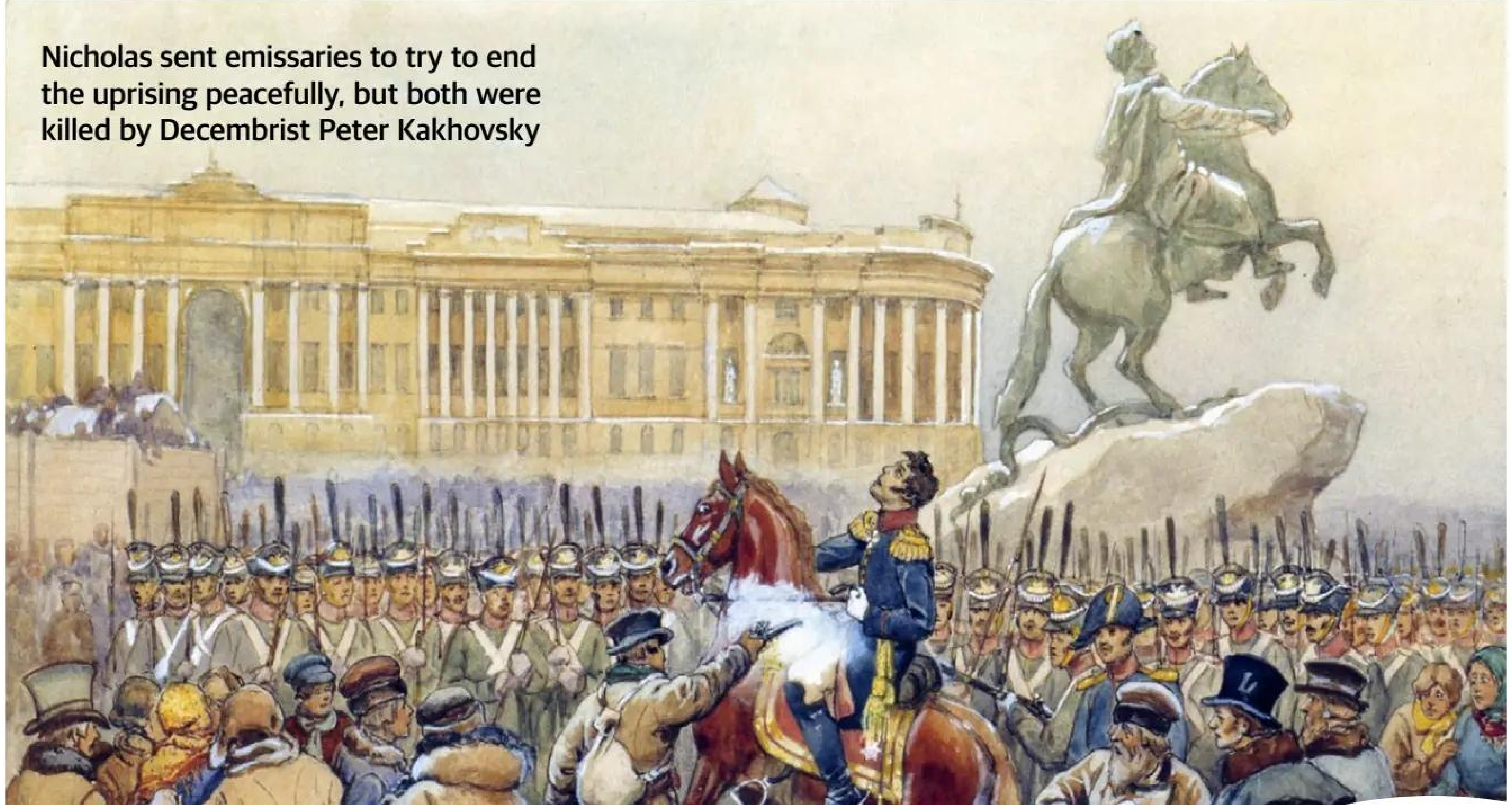
Nicholas himself led his Preobrazhensky Guard Regiment out to confront the rebels. He was soon joined by his Horse Guards Regiment and the Chevalier Guards. In the meantime, curious onlookers were gathering in Senate Square to see what was going on. Nicholas attempted to end the uprising without bloodshed, but two of his officers who tried to parley with them were shot and killed by Peter Kakhovsky, a leading Decembrist conspirator, for their efforts.

Nicholas ordered the first attack, by his Horse Guards, but they slid on the icy pavement, and since the troopers were more used to parade drill than combat, they had arrived with blunt sabres that were of little use. Only when another attack, this time by Nicholas' Chevalier Guards, was stymied did the tsar allow artillery to be employed. The gunners blasted the rebels with grapeshot, this being a hail of iron balls spewed from a cannon mouth that was especially effective against densely packed soldiers. The grapeshot tore bloody holes in the Decembrist lines, which rapidly began to dissolve in the face of the sudden onslaught.

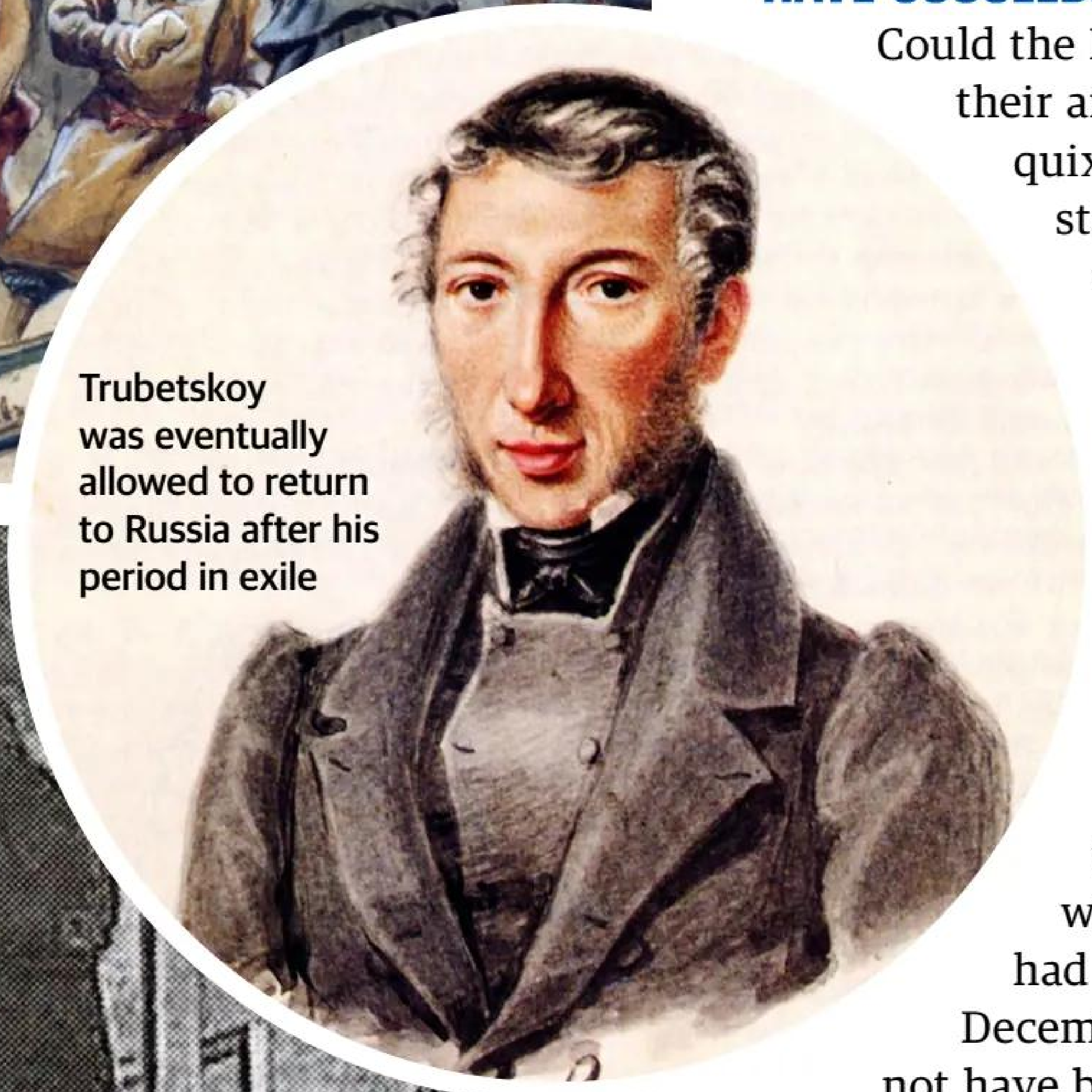
An attempt was then made by some Decembrists to take the Peter and Paul Fortress, from whence the insurgents could



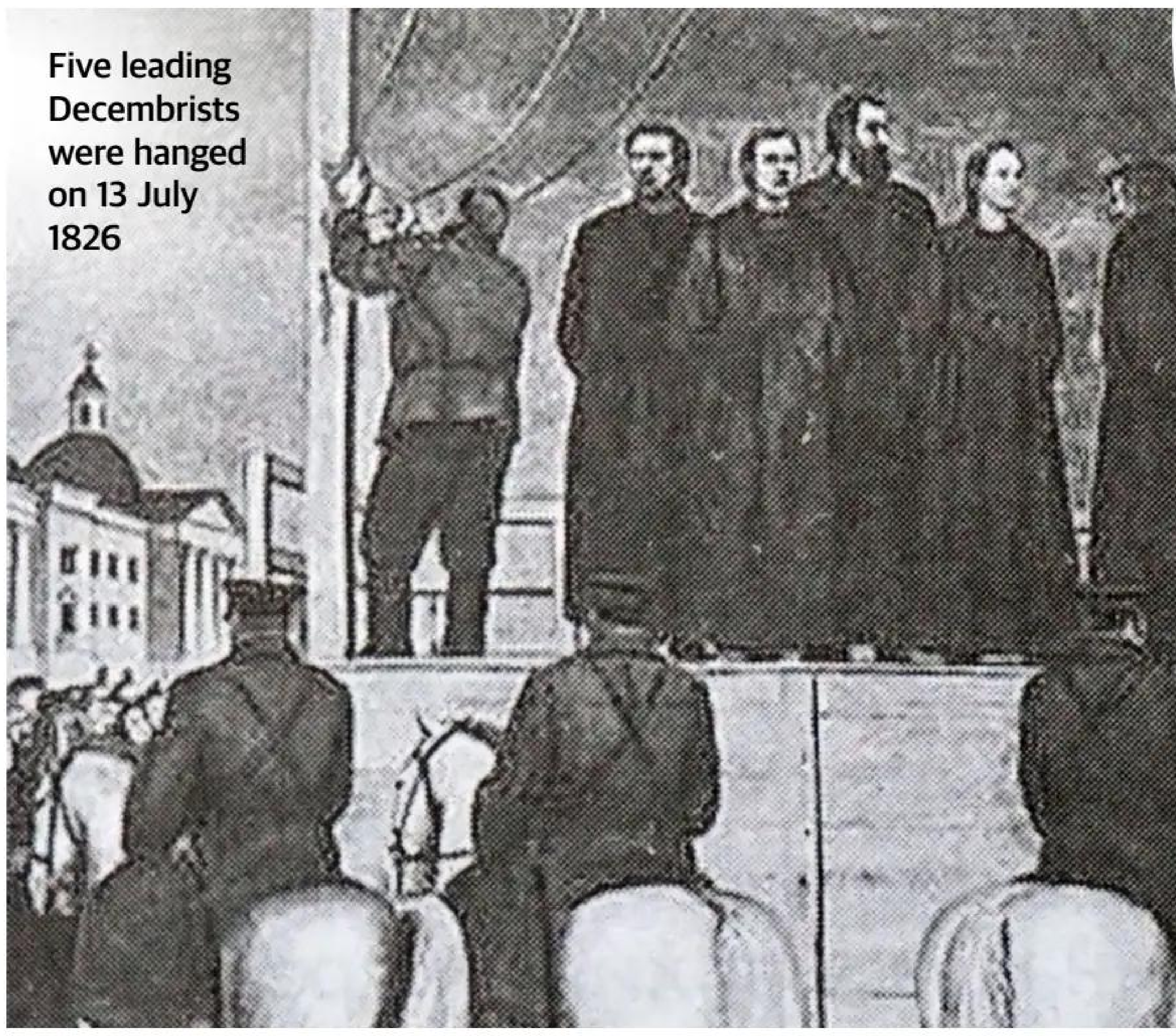
Nicholas, shaken by the Decembrist Revolt, would become a sternly anti-revolutionary European monarch



Nicholas sent emissaries to try to end the uprising peacefully, but both were killed by Decembrist Peter Kakhovsky



Trubetskoy was eventually allowed to return to Russia after his period in exile



Five leading Decembrists were hanged on 13 July 1826

use its cannons to fire on the tsar's Winter Palace, but this was halted when the frozen Neva River, on which they were forming, was broken up by cannon fire.

This was not the last of the violent uprisings against Nicholas. The Chernigov Regiment, based in Ukraine and affiliated with the Southern Society, also rose against him two weeks later, on 30 December, but this revolt was rapidly put down by loyalist soldiers as well.

INTERROGATION AND TRIALS

Beginning on 14 December, the defeated insurgents were quickly taken before the tsar for questioning. These ultimately amounted to 579 suspects. The net was cast widely, with conspirators arrested from outside of just the Northern Society. Nicholas would sentence five to hang and another 85 to incarceration, exile, or hard labour in Siberia.

The sentences of those hanged were carried out on 13 July 1826 in the Peter and Paul Fortress. These included Peter Kakhovsky, who had killed the tsar's peace emissaries in St. Petersburg on 14 December; Kondraty Ryleev, of the Northern Society; Pavel Pestel, a leading intellectual of the Southern Society; Sergei Muraviev-Apostol, another Southern Society member who had commanded the Chernigov Regiment insurrection; and Mikhail Bestuzhev-Ryumin, who had taken part in the same insurrection alongside Muraviev-Apostol.

Sergei Trubetskoy, who had been the official leader of the Decembrist revolt in St. Petersburg, was not among them. He escaped the hangman's noose and was instead given a lifetime sentence of hard labour.

Of those who were hanged, the ropes tore for two of them, and their legs broke when they struck the ground. One said, "Poor Russia, we don't even know how to hang a man properly."

MIGHT THE DECEMBRISTS HAVE SUCCEEDED?

Could the Decembrists have achieved their aims, or was their plot a quixotic endeavour from the start? They were woefully outnumbered, and even if they had been able to depose the tsar (an unlikely prospect), there would have been no certainty that the rest of the Russian Army would have followed them. And what would have been the reaction of the ordinary Guardsmen when they realised they had been tricked by the Decembrist officers? It could not have been positive. Also, while Nicholas' brother Constantine was still in Poland, he would not have condoned any disloyalty toward Nicholas and would almost certainly have intervened with the troops at his disposal.

Further, even if Nicholas had agreed, under threat, to a constitution, it is difficult to see how he would have abided by one. His authoritarian instincts were against it. He was the tsar: all his subjects were bound to obey him. Disobedience was not a trifling matter. It is also impossible to envision a Russia in which the tsar might have been deposed, with the rest of the empire meekly accepting the treasonous actions of a relative handful of young officers. Civil war would have been the result.

In an unhappy irony, the Decembrists probably set back their own reformist cause by scaring Nicolas as they did. Afterward, Nicholas would become the leading figure of political reaction on the continent and earn himself the epithet of 'Gendarme of Europe' for his anti-revolutionary fervour.

Image source: Alamy

Partitioning Persia

After more than 18 months of conflict, the Russo-Persian War of 1826–28 concluded with the Russian seizure of the fortress of Yerevan in Iran. The last in several wars between Imperial Russia and the Persian Empire, the loss of the stronghold forced the Persians to come to terms, resulting in the Treaty of Turkmenchay. This agreement saw Persia ceding territories that would later come to be known as Armenia and Azerbaijan to the Russians. By the late 18th century the Russian Empire ruled over a sixth of the world's landmass, placing it third behind the British and Mongol empires in terms of size.

Image source: Alamy

Alexander II

Liberating Russia

ALEXANDER II WAS A MAN OF CONTRADICTIONS. SWINGING WILDLY BETWEEN LIBERAL AND REACTIONARY POLICIES, HE LEFT A LEGACY OF IMPORTANT REFORMS AND PERSONAL FAILURES

Written by Greg King

For all of his repressive rule, Nicholas I had been farsighted in one thing: the education of his heir, who took the throne as Alexander II. From his birth in 1818, Alexander had been raised to be a liberal and progressive ruler; in this Nicholas I apparently recognised that change was inevitable. He himself was unable to implement serious reforms, but everyone expected that Alexander would be a different sort of ruler. They were not to be disappointed.

Alexander's first task was to end the disastrous Crimean War. Russia was exhausted and its military on the verge of ruin. The Treaty of Paris, signed on 30 March 1856, brought an end to the entire, ignoble adventure. Russia was forced to cede significant territories and lost its rights on the Black Sea and freedom of passage through the Bosphorus.

With peace accomplished, Alexander set about reforming his empire. The changes came in astonishingly rapid succession. The decimated navy was rebuilt and equipped with new artillery. The army was modernised, with conscription extended to members of the aristocracy and laws introduced that forbade commanders from using corporal punishment. New railways helped spread industrial development, and for the first time Russia developed a working class.

Russia's judicial system was completely reorganised, with the election of judges, elimination of secret hearings, and trial by jury. Alexander took the first tentative steps toward self-governance by his people, establishing a system of district representative bodies called zemstvos. These were allowed to make decisions on local levels rather than rely on St. Petersburg's bloated bureaucracy. Education was promoted and institutions of higher learning sprang up across the country.

Alexander II's greatest reform, though, came in 1861, when he emancipated Russia's serfs. It took four years of hard-fought battles against the entrenched powers: conservatives and aristocrats opposed the measure, loathe to lose thousands of free labourers. But Alexander was adamant: "It is better to abolish serfdom from above than to wait for the time when it will begin to abolish itself from below," he declared.

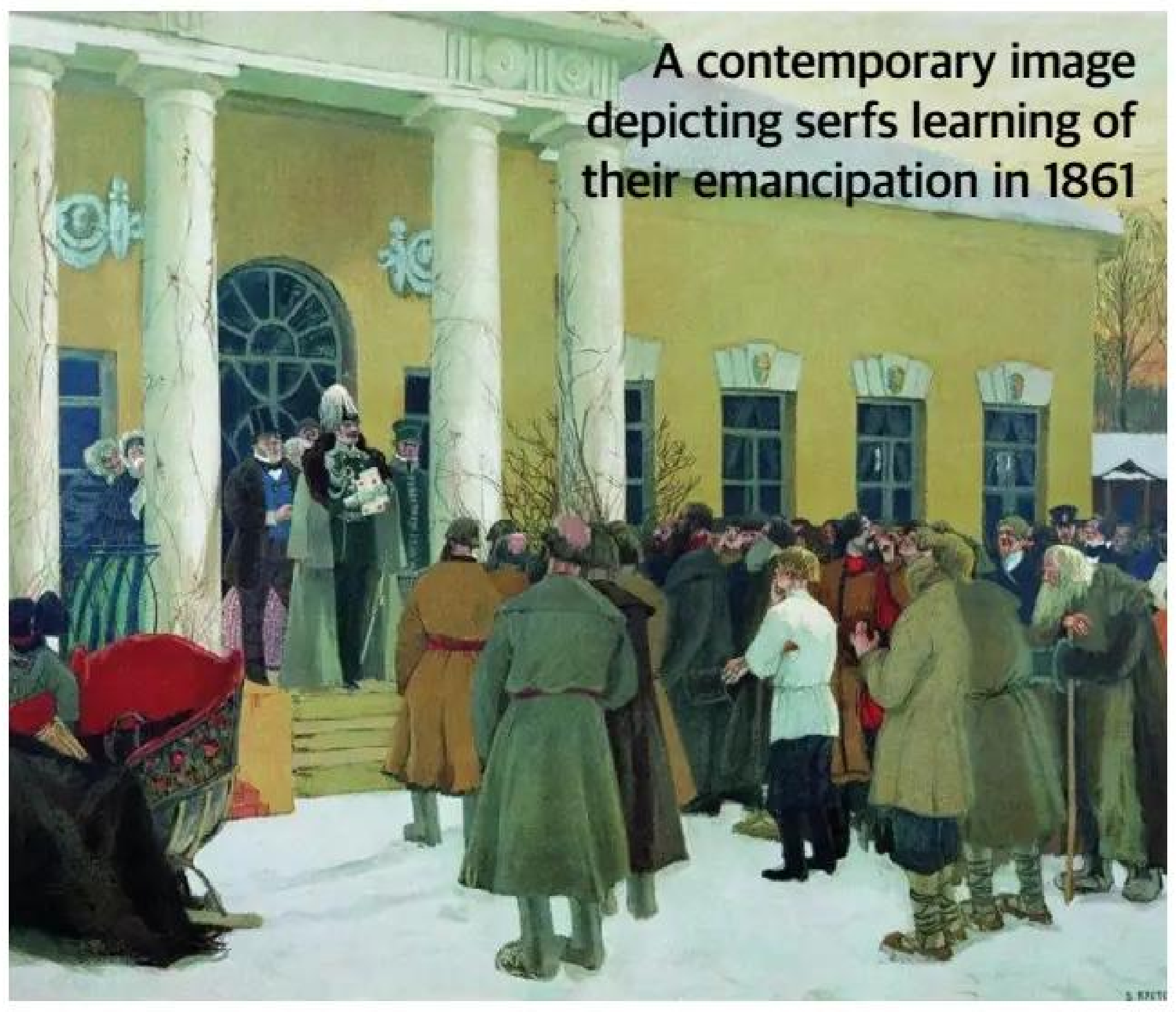
The announcement came on 19 February 1861. With the sweep of a pen some 23 million serfs gained their freedom. For the first time in Russia's history, they could move about, marry, and own property without permission from their masters. The action won Alexander the epitaph 'Tsar-Liberator', but the end result often proved as disastrous as the inhuman system the emperor had abolished. The state advanced money to landowners who had lost their free manpower; in turn, these landowners were to give this money to the serfs so that they could purchase farms. But the terms of repayment were such that many of the freed serfs ended up being impoverished; when they could not repay the loans, the landowners likewise faced financial ruin. Though they initially hailed the emancipation, liberals soon decried the effects, while conservatives and nobles resented their loss of power and financial security.

Alexander II's foreign policy also seemed to seesaw in confounding ways. In 1867, he sold Alaska to the United States, fearing that the British would somehow invade it, and he allied Russia to Germany and Austria-Hungary by joining the Three Emperors' League in 1872. Neighbouring countries were treated capriciously. In 1863, Alexander granted increased autonomy to the Russian grand duchy of Finland: it was allowed to have its own parliament, currency, and to promote the Finnish language. Poland, on the other hand, remained a thorn in Russia's side. Opposing the subjugation imposed by Nicholas I, Polish nationalists rebelled. In January 1863, Warsaw erupted in violence as partisans blew up bridges, cut telegraph lines, and murdered dozens of Russian officers. It took nearly a year to restore order, and with a draconian hand: thousands were executed or exiled to Siberia, Poland lost the last vestiges of independence, and even its language was banned.

Portrait of Alexander II, 1855

© Getty

Alexander II, circa 1878


A contemporary image depicting serfs learning of their emancipation in 1861

Russia's biggest foreign policy blunder was its brief war against the Ottoman Empire. In 1876, Ottoman-controlled Bulgaria rose up against the Turks. The revolt was crushed but Russian public opinion was outraged at the treatment of fellow Orthodox Christians. This religious appeal finally convinced Alexander to act: in April 1877, he declared war on the Ottoman Empire. Russia was successful in its endeavour: Bulgaria was liberated from the Turks, though at a cost of some 200,000 Russian lives. But this triumph evaporated during the ensuing peace talks. Afraid that Russia would use the victory to gain a foothold in the Balkans, the European powers united and forced Alexander II to accept terms agreed upon at the Congress of Berlin meant to prevent the Russian Empire from expanding its sphere of influence.

The end of the war coincided with growing unrest against Alexander's rule. Both Paul I and Nicholas I had made a habit of isolating themselves in protective cocoons, but Alexander II liked to be seen among his people. On pleasant afternoons he walked in St. Petersburg's Summer Garden, attended only by an adjutant. In April 1866, a young student named Dmitry Karakozov spotted him and made an unsuccessful attempt against his life. A year later, while Alexander was visiting Paris, a Polish national made another.

These efforts, by those espousing additional liberal reforms, ironically had the opposite effect. Alexander was confounded: he had made repeated concessions and yet found himself hated and derided as a tyrant. Conservatives remained disgruntled, while liberals pushed for self-governance and a more open society. Terrorism drove Alexander toward reaction; he turned his back on his previous agenda. The Okhrana began a clampdown on universities and newspapers faced heavy censorship laws; liberal advisers and ministers found themselves turned out of office, replaced with reactionary officials; and new military tribunals began prosecuting suspected dissidents.

> *"Am I such a wild beast that they must hound me to death?"*

This abrupt change of course only led to further discontent. Groups of disaffected students, workers, and would-be revolutionaries sprung up, determined to overthrow the existing order through violence. In April 1879, a former student named Alexander Soloviev spotted the emperor on his way to an appointment, aimed his revolver, and got off five shots before being wrestled to the ground. Miraculously the emperor escaped harm, but Soloviev was quickly tried, found guilty, and executed. In December, members of the revolutionary group Narodnaya Volya (Party of the People's Will) bungled an attempt to blow up the imperial train. Two months later they tried again, brazenly planting dynamite beneath the emperor's dining room in the Winter Palace. By chance Alexander happened to be late that evening and thus escaped, though 11 others perished in the explosion. "Am I such a wild beast that they must hound me to death?" the emperor lamented.

Consistency was never a strong trait among the Romanovs. Soon after the explosion in the Winter Palace, Alexander II appointed

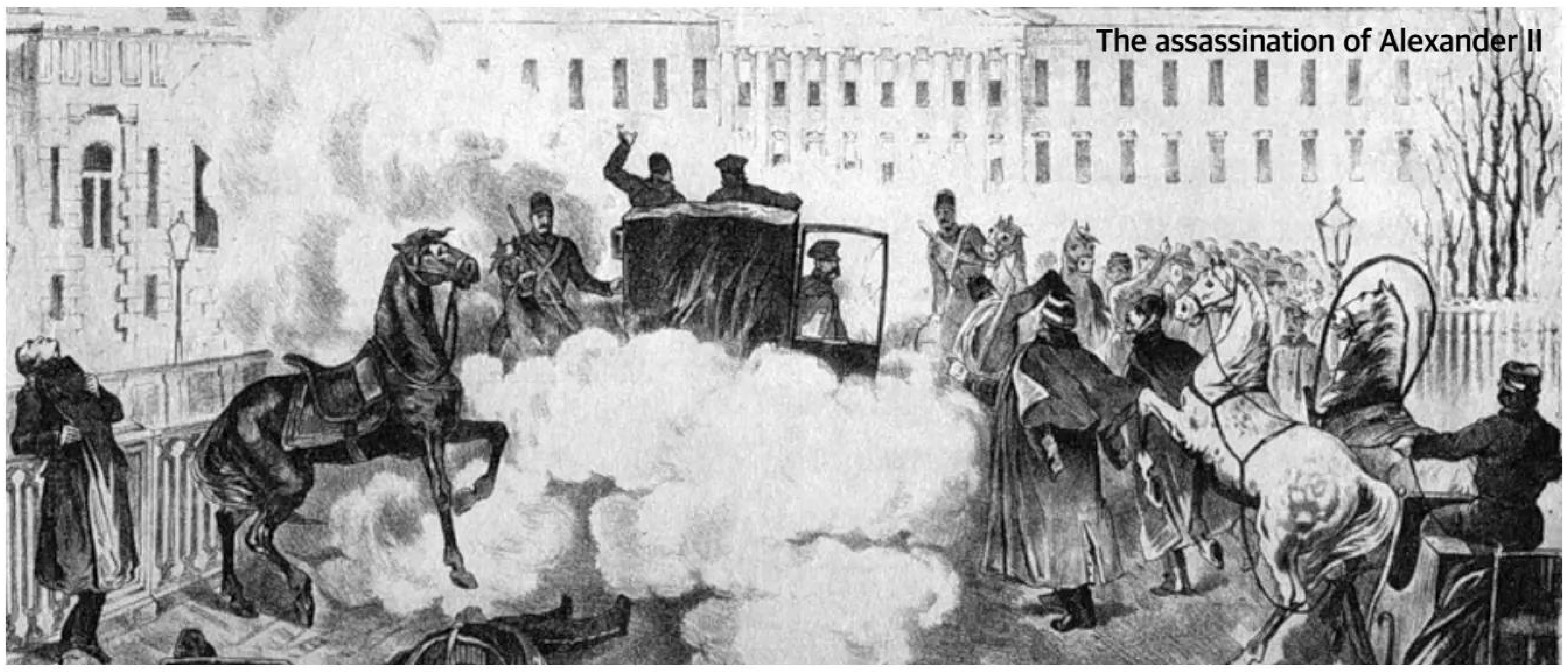
A scandalous liaison

ALEXANDER II'S AUDACIOUS AFFAIR WITH A TEENAGE PRINCESS DEVASTATED HIS FAMILY AND LEFT THE COUNTRY STUNNED

Alexander II always had a roving eye: despite his marriage to Empress Maria Alexandrovna, there were several mistresses and rumours of illegitimate children, though these affairs were always conducted with discretion. This all changed in 1866, when the 48-year-old Alexander began a scandalous liaison with 17-year-old Princess Catherine Dolgorukova after bedding and discarding her sister. The emperor behaved like a lovesick teenager, confiding that they had fallen on "each other like wild cats". Declaring Catherine, called Katia, his "wife before God," Alexander assured her in shockingly frank letters that he wanted to make love to her "on every piece of furniture" and "in every room". Between 1872-78, Katia gave him four illegitimate children, and in a turn that left his court aghast, Alexander appointed Katia a maid-of-honour to his wife and gave her and their children a suite of rooms in the Winter Palace just above the apartments of the empress. He caused more offense in 1874 by bestowing the titles of Prince or Princess Yurievskaya on his illegitimate children.

Empress Maria Alexandrovna died of tuberculosis in 1880. Alexander waited just two weeks after her burial to secretly wed Katia. Inevitably word of the ceremony leaked out, and the emperor was roundly criticised for his apparent indifference to his late wife's memory, to his family's feelings, and to the dignity of the imperial throne. His heir, Alexander, was so enraged that he threatened to renounce his place in the succession, take his family, and leave the empire. The situation reached a fever pitch when Alexander II hinted that he might crown Katia as his new empress and legitimise his marriage and second family. Before the crisis erupted, though, Alexander II was assassinated. Katia took their children and moved to France, where she lived in semi-obscurity until her death in 1922.

Left: Katia, Alexander II's mistress and later secret wife


The assassination of Alexander II

Alexander II on his deathbed

the liberal Count Mikhail Loris-Melikov as minister of the interior. The count advised immediate reforms to ease the tense situation: censorship was relaxed, taxes were lightened, and temporary restrictions on the zemstvos were lifted. By the beginning of 1881, Alexander decided to do the unthinkable and grant Russia a parliament and a limited constitution, hoping that such measures might win popular support for the throne. Though restricted in scope, these concessions would, for all practical purposes, end the autocracy. Alexander II signed the document and prepared to make it public, but he would never get the chance.

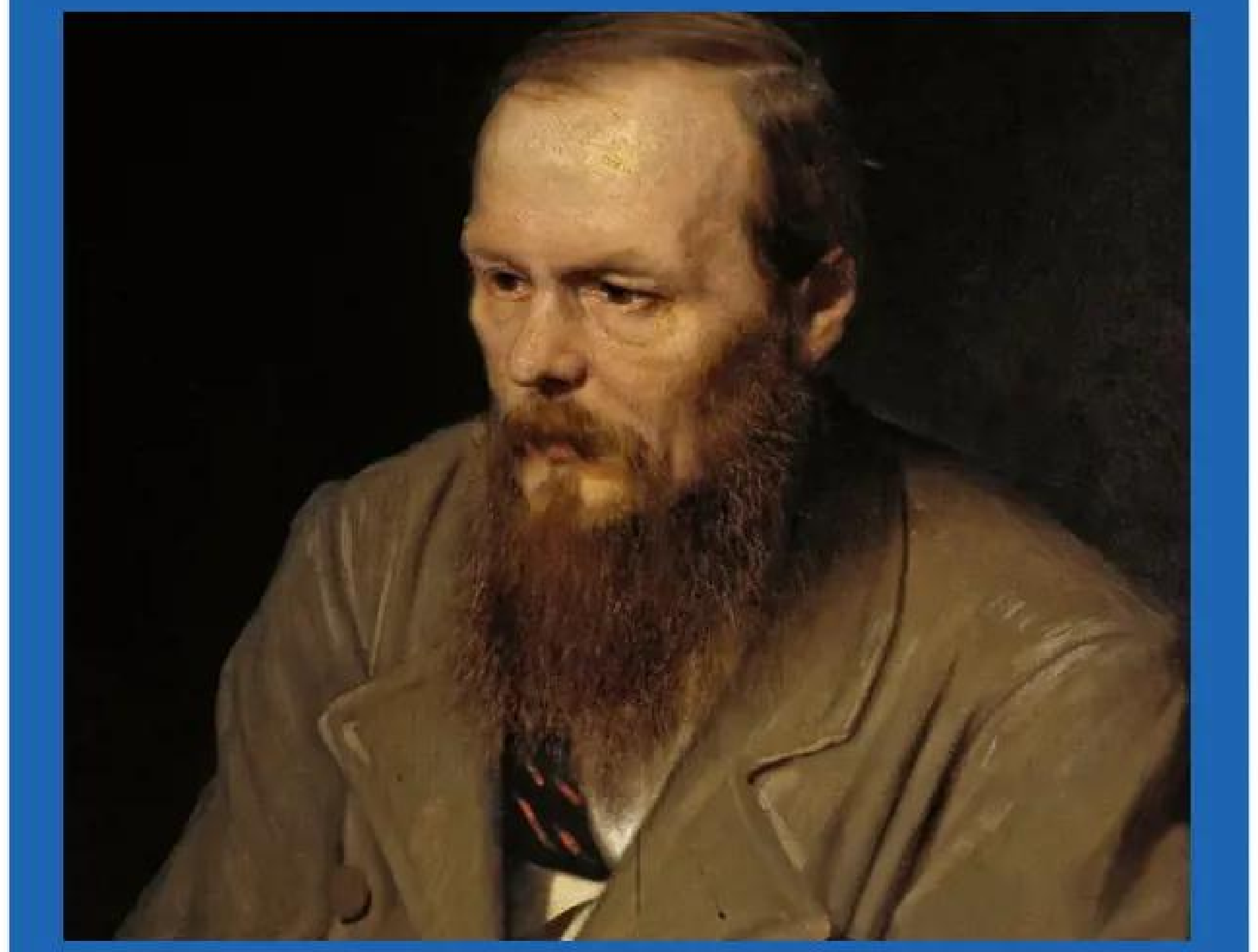
On the afternoon of Sunday 1 March (O.S) 1881, the emperor was driving along St. Petersburg's Catherine Canal, safely ensconced in an armour-plated carriage, when Nikolai Rysakov, a member of the Narodnaya Volya, hurled a bomb through the air. In a flash the carriage shattered, horses bolted, and wounded members of the Imperial Guard fell to the snowy embankment. Incredibly, the emperor emerged from the carriage shaken but unharmed. Seeing him, a wounded officer exclaimed, "Thank God Your Majesty is safe!"

"It is too early to thank God!" came a shout from the crowd as student Ignaty Grinevitsky tossed a second bomb at the emperor's feet. Windows shattered, the pavement exploded, and agonised cries filled the air. The smoke cleared to reveal Alexander II laying against a railing. One leg was missing below the knee, the other was a pulpy mess; blood oozed from dozens of wounds on Alexander's face and his torn stomach, staining the snow crimson. With his last words, the emperor whispered, "Home… to the palace… to die there."

A sleigh rushed the emperor to the Winter Palace as his family raced to the scene. For an agonised hour they watched as doctors hovered uselessly over the injured man, whose eyes stared vacantly. Finally, Alexander's bloody hand fell to the floor with a thud. The new tsar, Alexander III, swept from the room with determined steps. Convinced that his father's liberal policies were responsible for the events of that terrible Sunday, Alexander III rejected plans for the proposed reforms and tore up the would-be constitution. Instead, he announced that he would maintain the "justice and strength of the autocracy".

Notes from the underground

THE REIGN OF ALEXANDER II SAW THE RISE OF RUSSIA'S INTELLIGENTSIA



After the repression of Nicholas I, Russian literature and philosophy blossomed into a powerful voice for the dispossessed under Alexander II. The 'Intelligentsia' was born: factory workers and eager students who devoured Marx and Engels; would-be revolutionaries who joined anarchist groups dedicated to ending the autocracy; and moderates who pushed for liberal reforms. Though divided in their aims, most believed the absolute power of the tsar and the privileges of the nobility must change.

It was Fyodor Dostoevsky whose works best captured the angst and hopes of this generation. Deeming him a potential subversive, Nicholas I exiled him to Siberia in 1849. The experience both seared and made the writer. When Dostoevsky returned to St. Petersburg at the beginning of Alexander II's reign, he immediately set to work on a series of novels filled with the strife of tsarist Russia. His *Notes from the Underground* (1864) conveyed the squalid, hopeless life of a bureaucrat, especially when compared to the successful careers of his colleagues who cynically advanced through cruelty and revenge. The sense of alienation grew in *Crime and Punishment*, with Raskolnikov's murder of a pawnbroker and his redemption by a prostitute; *The Idiot*, with its twisted tale of sexual obsession; *The Possessed*, where revolutionaries take centre stage and commit murder to prove their loyalty to the movement; and *The Brothers Karamazov*, with its complicated repudiation of religion and embrace of humanist ideals. The books aptly summarised the tenure of Alexander II's reign, a time of tortured intrigues, warring philosophies, secret societies, and an overwhelming desire to change the destiny of mankind for the better.

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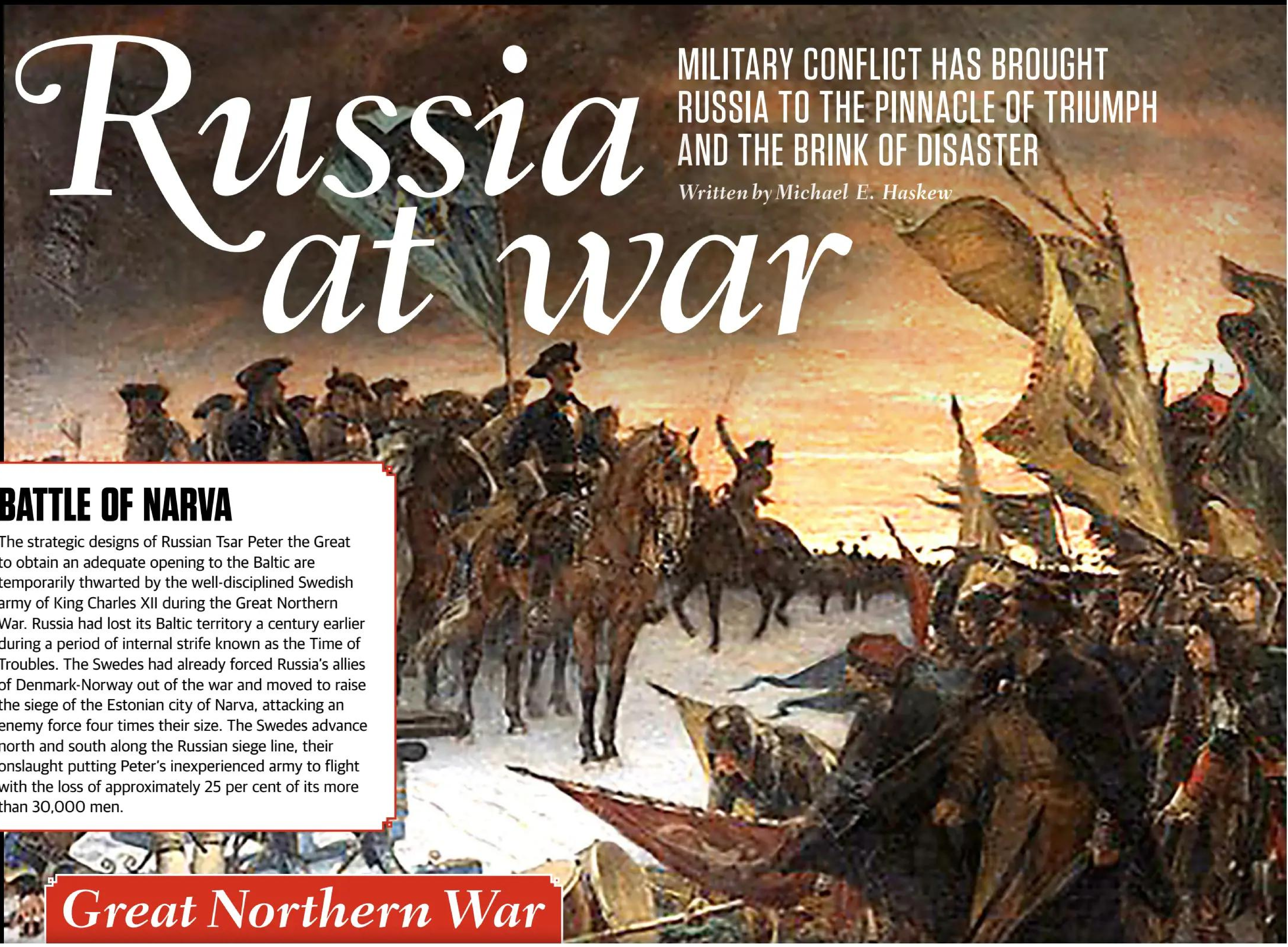
Russia at war

MILITARY CONFLICT HAS BROUGHT RUSSIA TO THE PINNACLE OF TRIUMPH AND THE BRINK OF DISASTER

Written by Michael E. Haskew



Great Northern War

30 November 1700

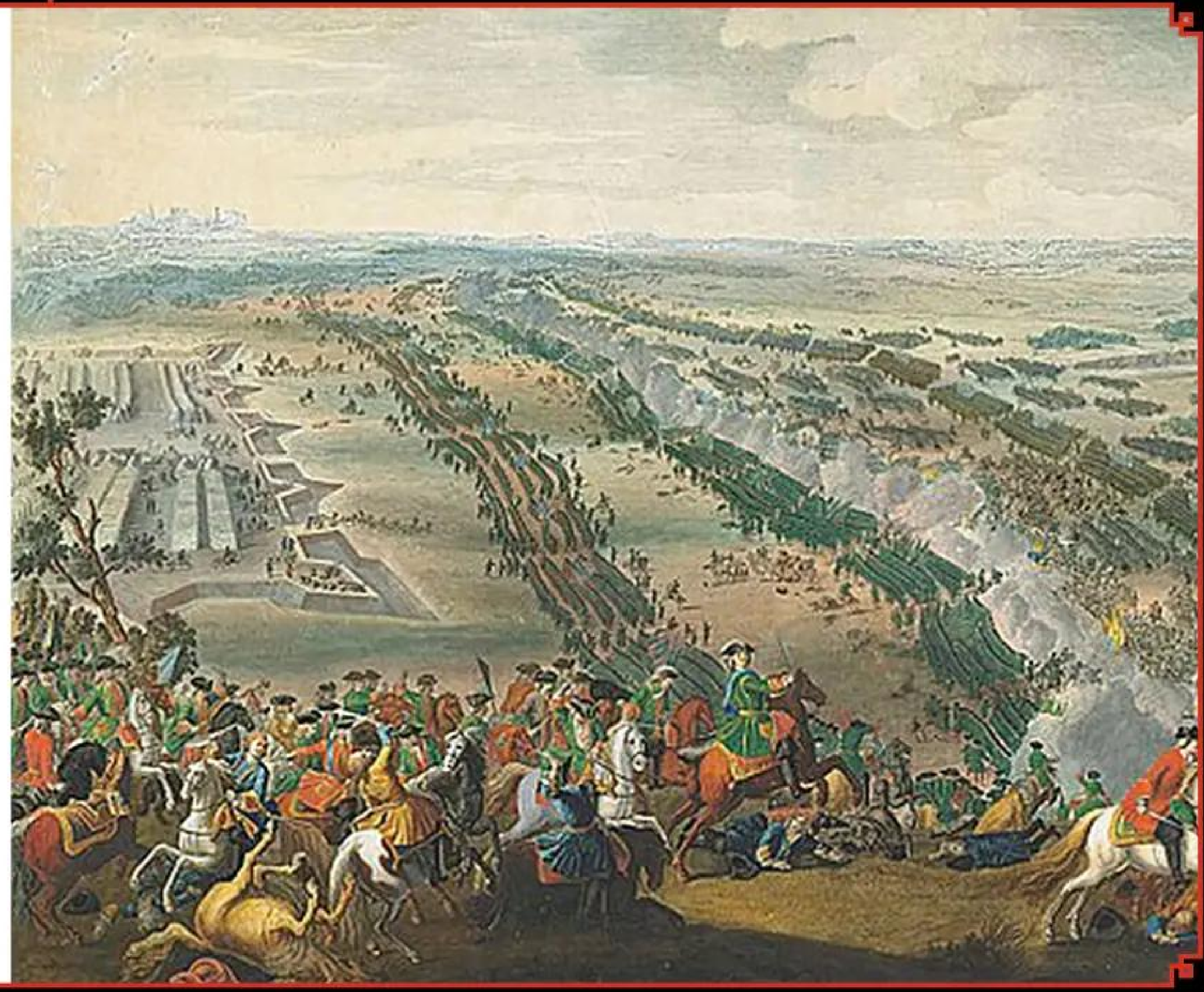
BATTLE OF NARVA

The strategic designs of Russian Tsar Peter the Great to obtain an adequate opening to the Baltic are temporarily thwarted by the well-disciplined Swedish army of King Charles XII during the Great Northern War. Russia had lost its Baltic territory a century earlier during a period of internal strife known as the Time of Troubles. The Swedes had already forced Russia's allies of Denmark-Norway out of the war and moved to raise the siege of the Estonian city of Narva, attacking an enemy force four times their size. The Swedes advance north and south along the Russian siege line, their onslaught putting Peter's inexperienced army to flight with the loss of approximately 25 per cent of its more than 30,000 men.

8 July 1709

BATTLE OF POLTAVA

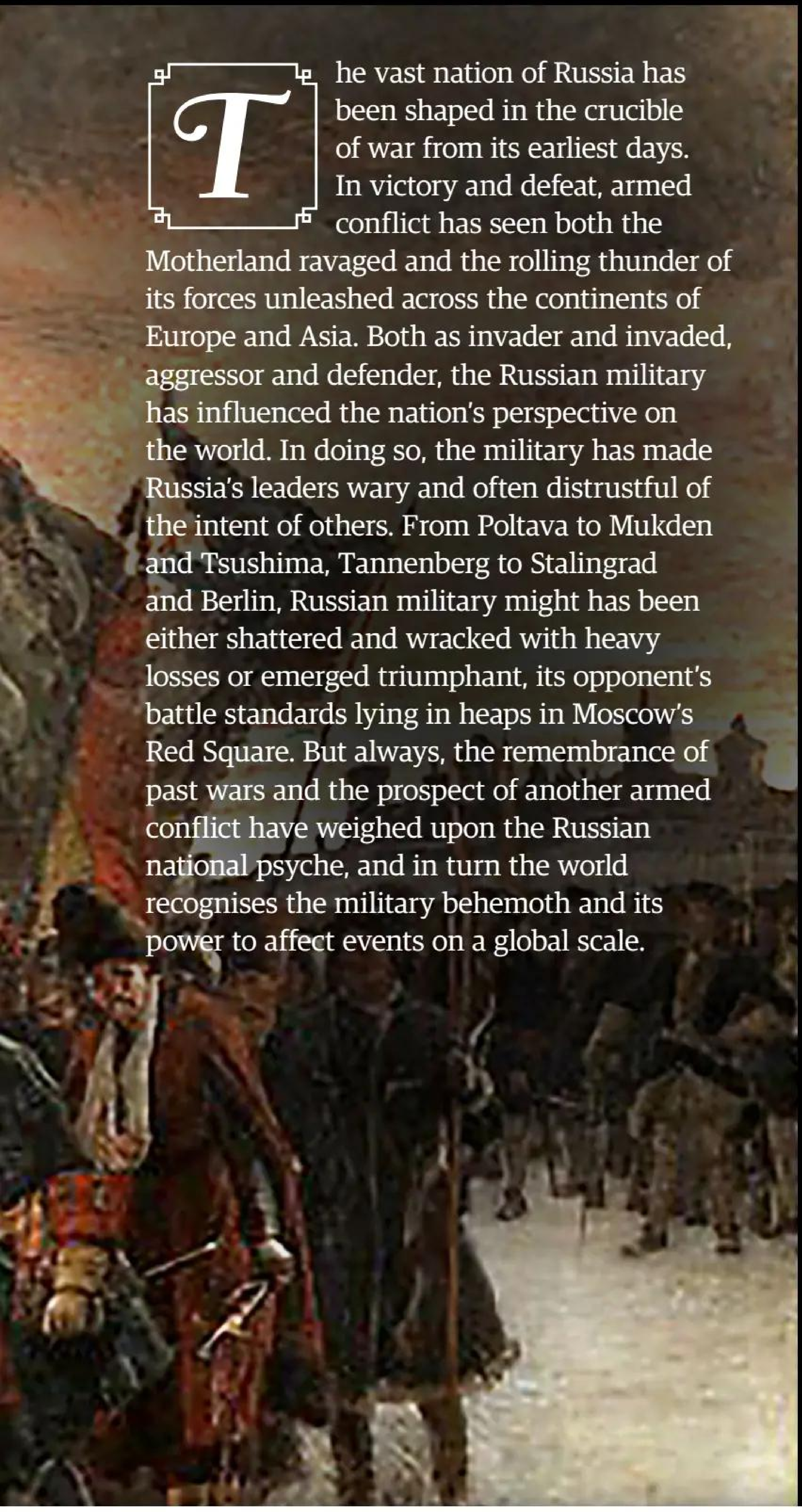
In the decisive battle of the Great Northern War, the Russian army of Peter the Great defeats the Swedish under Charles XII, ending their invasion of Russia and the era of Sweden as a major power in northern Europe. After six years of fighting other enemies, Charles had turned again toward Russia; his invasion quickly yielded disastrous results. However, the Swedish king refused to withdraw, ordering his army to besiege Poltava, west of the Vorskla River in Ukraine. Peter's army of 80,000 breaks the siege and virtually destroys the Swedish force, weakened and dwindled to only 17,000 as Charles escapes with just 1,500 surviving soldiers. Russia emerges as the dominant power in northern and central Europe.



10 September 1721

TREATY OF NYSTAD

After previously concluding peace agreements with other rivals in northern Europe, Sweden agrees to terms with Russia, ending the long Great Northern War. The terms of the Treaty of Nystad relegate Sweden to a secondary position among the nations of Europe. Sweden, bowing to the inevitable as its regional holdings along the Baltic Sea are already occupied by Russia and other powers, cedes land in the Karelian peninsula as well as Ingria, Estonia, and Lithonia on the eastern shores of the Baltic to its longtime adversary. The treaty further facilitates Russian dominance over Poland and ushers in an era of Russian hegemony in the Baltic region.



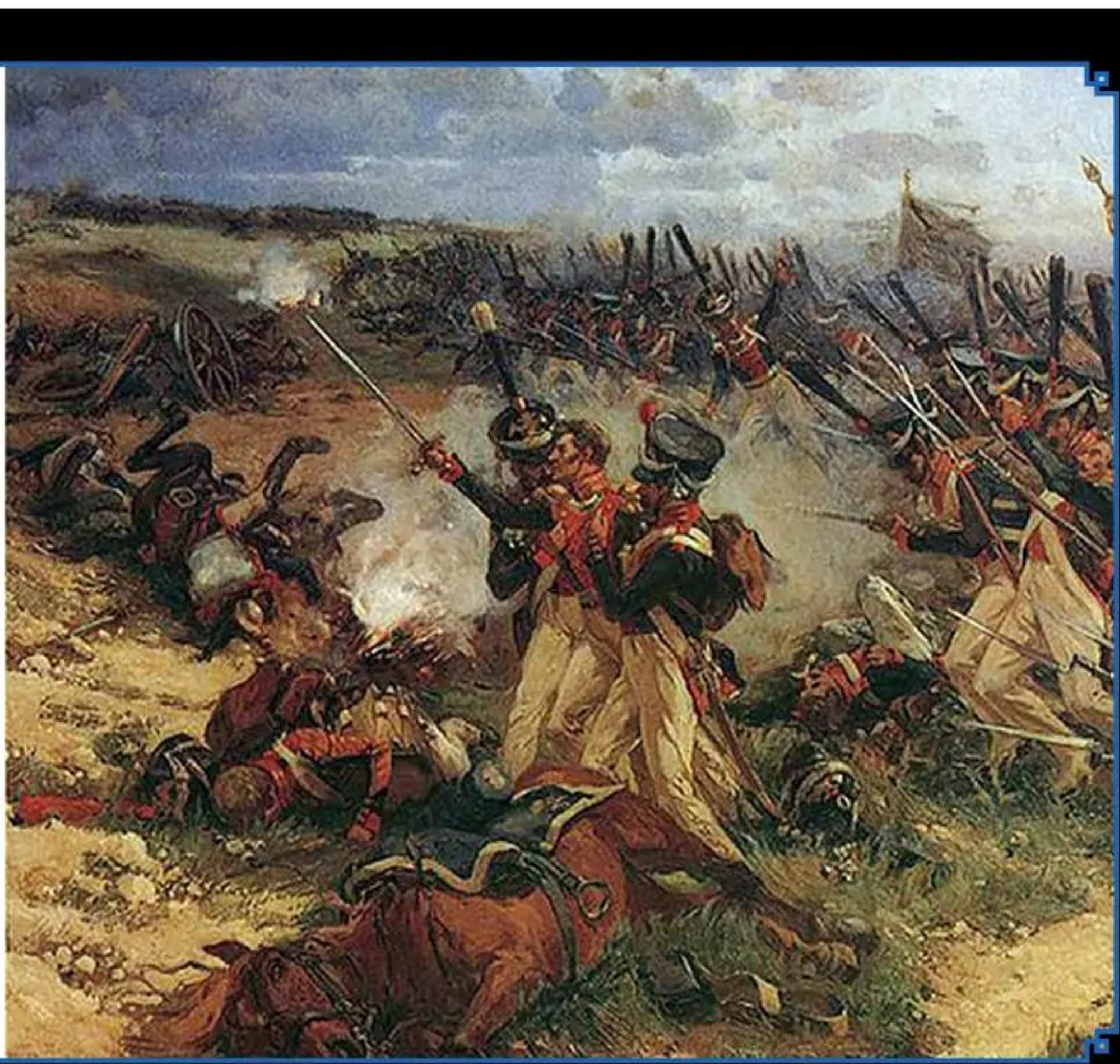
The vast nation of Russia has been shaped in the crucible of war from its earliest days. In victory and defeat, armed conflict has seen both the Motherland ravaged and the rolling thunder of its forces unleashed across the continents of Europe and Asia. Both as invader and invaded, aggressor and defender, the Russian military has influenced the nation's perspective on the world. In doing so, the military has made Russia's leaders wary and often distrustful of the intent of others. From Poltava to Mukden and Tsushima, Tannenberg to Stalingrad and Berlin, Russian military might has been either shattered and wracked with heavy losses or emerged triumphant, its opponent's battle standards lying in heaps in Moscow's Red Square. But always, the remembrance of past wars and the prospect of another armed conflict have weighed upon the Russian national psyche, and in turn the world recognises the military behemoth and its power to affect events on a global scale.

Napoleonic Wars

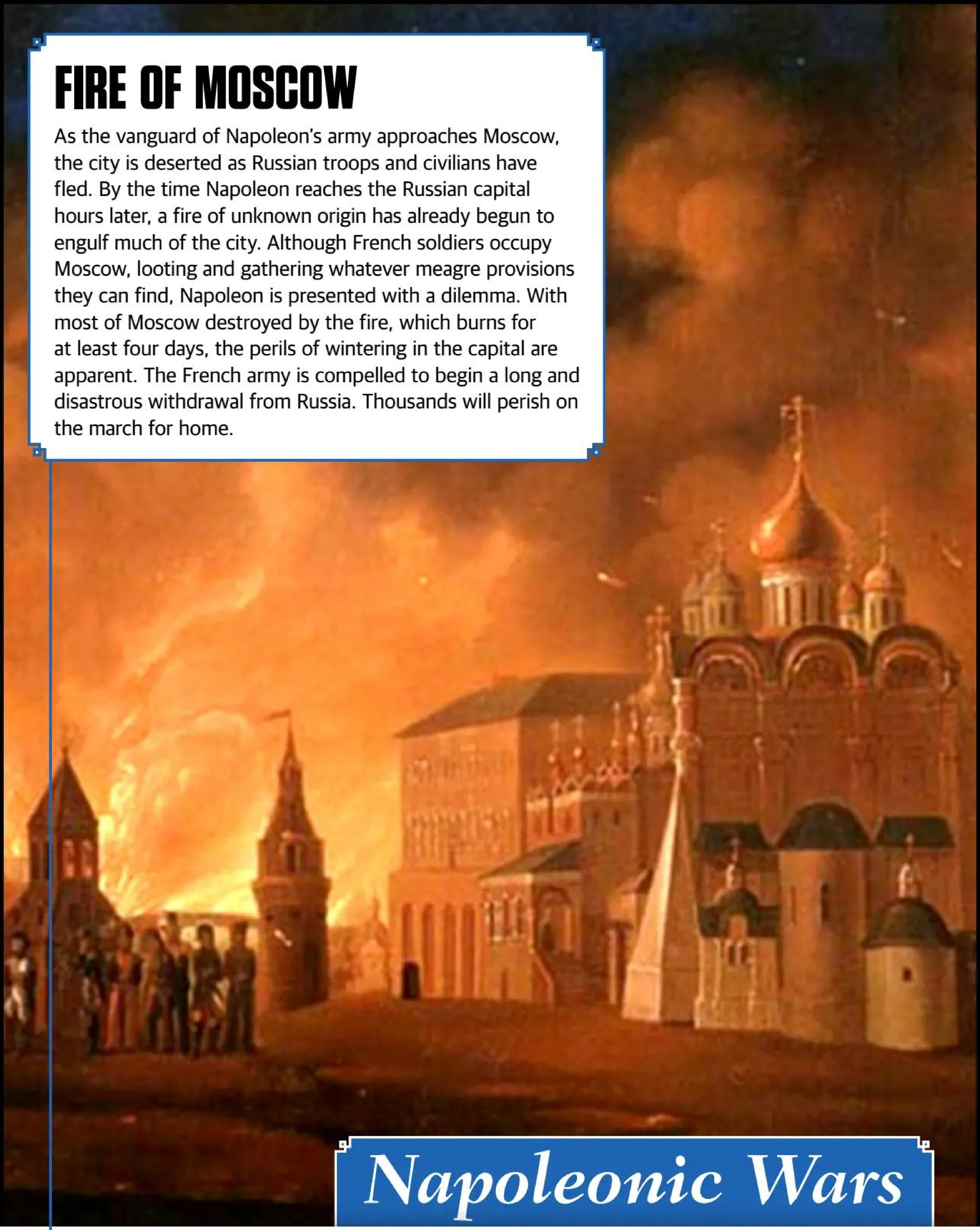
7 September 1812

BATTLE OF BORODINO

More than two months after the powerful French army of Napoleon Bonaparte invades Russia, General M.I. Kuzutov halts his defending army's retreat at the town of Borodino, just 110 kilometres (70 miles) from Moscow, to give battle in defence of the Russian capital city. The two armies, each numbering well over 100,000 troops, are locked in combat for much of the day, and Napoleon refuses to commit reserves that might gain a decisive victory. Instead, the French win a narrow triumph, allowing the Russians to withdraw after sustaining a staggering 45,000 casualties. Among them is a national hero, Prince Pyotr Bagration. A week after his victory at Borodino, Napoleon enters Moscow without opposition.



14-18 September 1812



FIRE OF MOSCOW

As the vanguard of Napoleon's army approaches Moscow, the city is deserted as Russian troops and civilians have fled. By the time Napoleon reaches the Russian capital hours later, a fire of unknown origin has already begun to engulf much of the city. Although French soldiers occupy Moscow, looting and gathering whatever meagre provisions they can find, Napoleon is presented with a dilemma. With most of Moscow destroyed by the fire, which burns for at least four days, the perils of wintering in the capital are apparent. The French army is compelled to begin a long and disastrous withdrawal from Russia. Thousands will perish on the march for home.

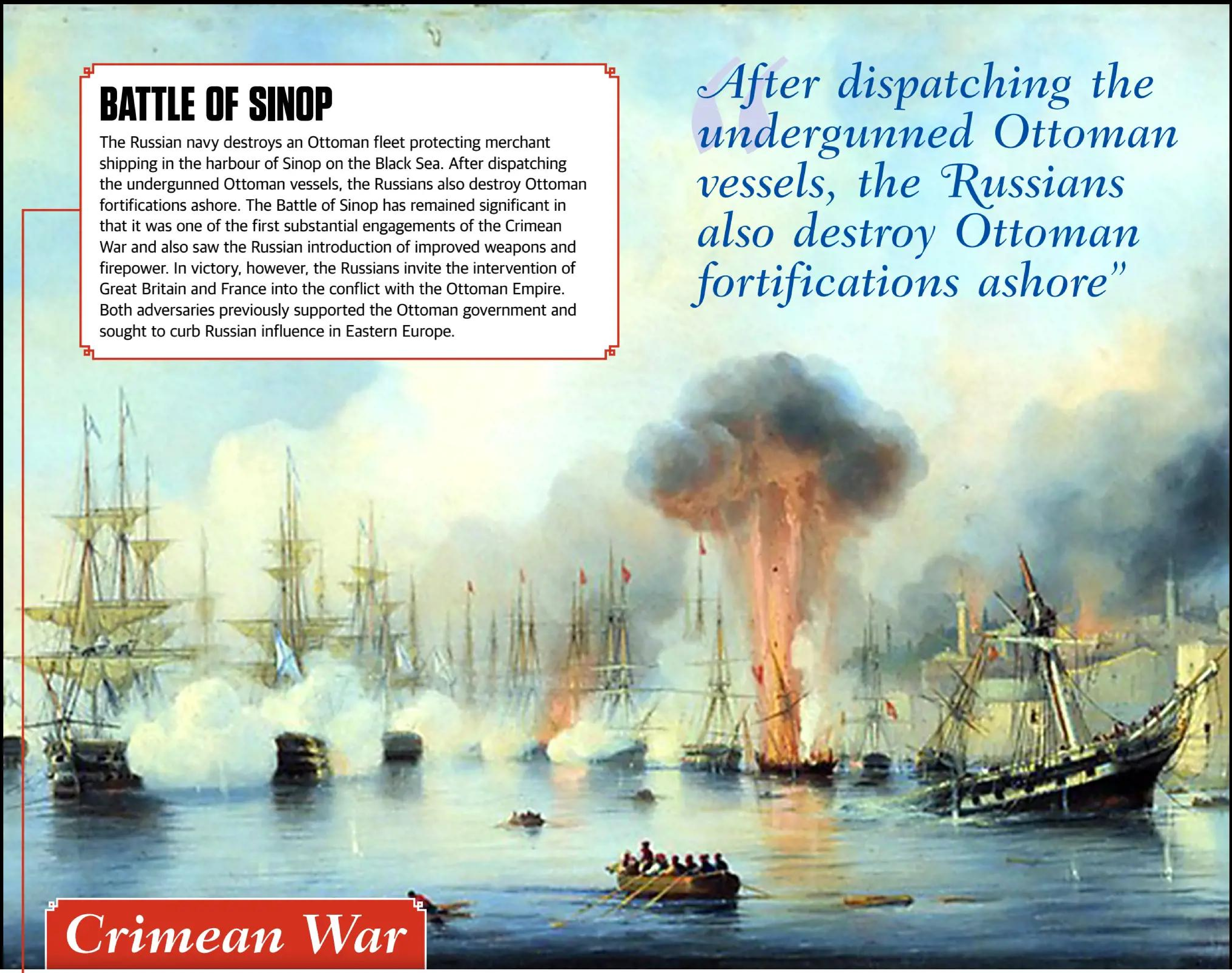
16-19 October 1813

BATTLE OF LEIPZIG

Following catastrophic losses during the 1812 retreat from Russia, Napoleon reorganises his army and launches an invasion of Germany to regain the initiative. However, his offensive leads to confrontation with a coalition of forces, including troops from Sweden, Austria, Prussia, and Russia, that outnumber his army 320,000 to 185,000. The French manage to hold off Prussian and Austrian troops in early attacks while protecting their lines of communication through Leipzig. However, they yield significant ground during nine hours of fighting on 18 October. Napoleon's initially orderly retreat the next day leads to heavy casualties when a single bridge is blown up prematurely. The defeat at the Battle of Leipzig, also known as the Battle of the Nations, ends Napoleon's territorial ambitions in Eastern Europe.

Image source: Wikipedia

Crimean War



30 November 1853

BATTLE OF SINOP

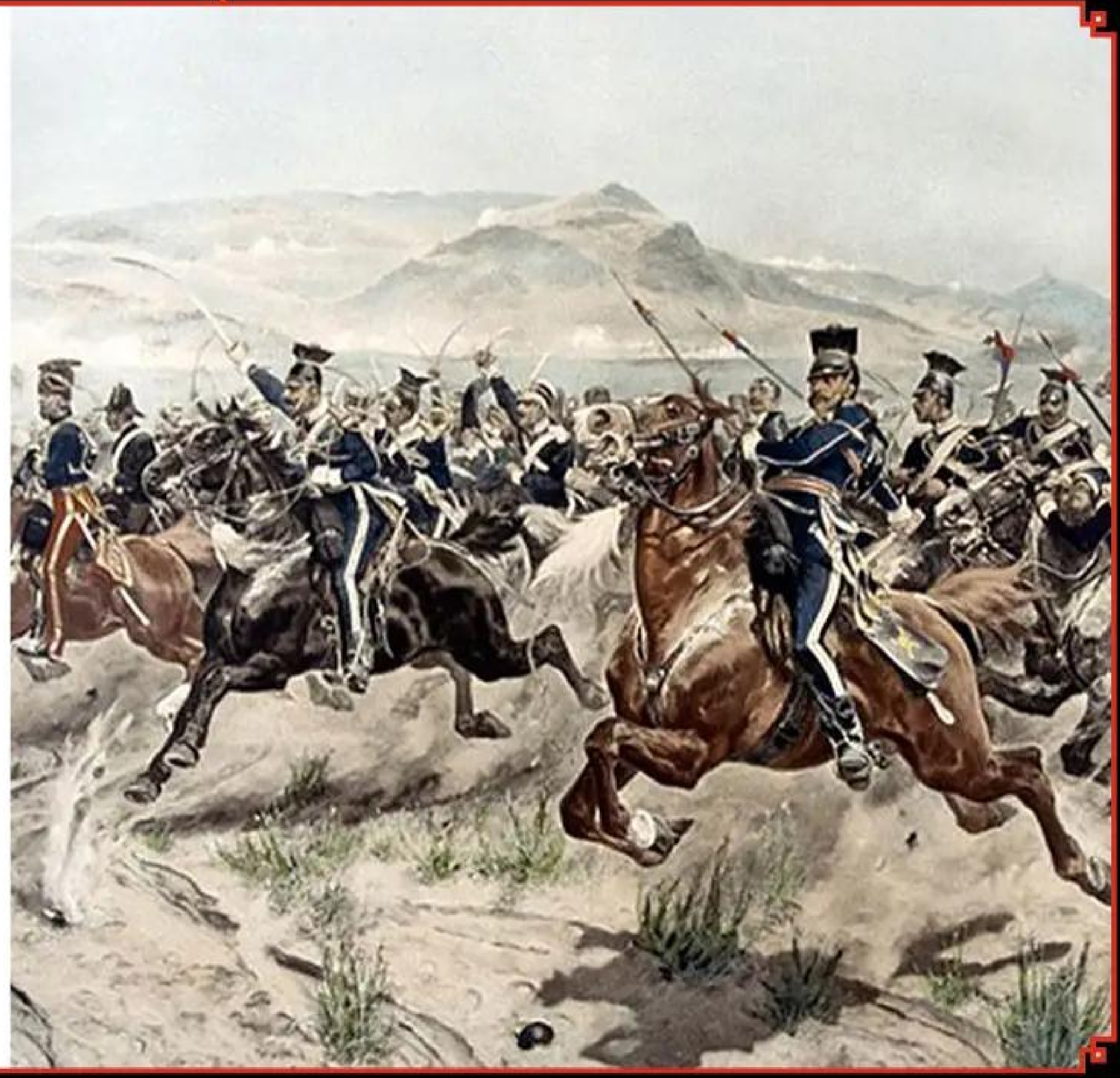
The Russian navy destroys an Ottoman fleet protecting merchant shipping in the harbour of Sinop on the Black Sea. After dispatching the undergunned Ottoman vessels, the Russians also destroy Ottoman fortifications ashore. The Battle of Sinop has remained significant in that it was one of the first substantial engagements of the Crimean War and also saw the Russian introduction of improved weapons and firepower. In victory, however, the Russians invite the intervention of Great Britain and France into the conflict with the Ottoman Empire. Both adversaries previously supported the Ottoman government and sought to curb Russian influence in Eastern Europe.

> *"After dispatching the undergunned Ottoman vessels, the Russians also destroy Ottoman fortifications ashore"*

25 October 1854

BATTLE OF BALAKLAVA

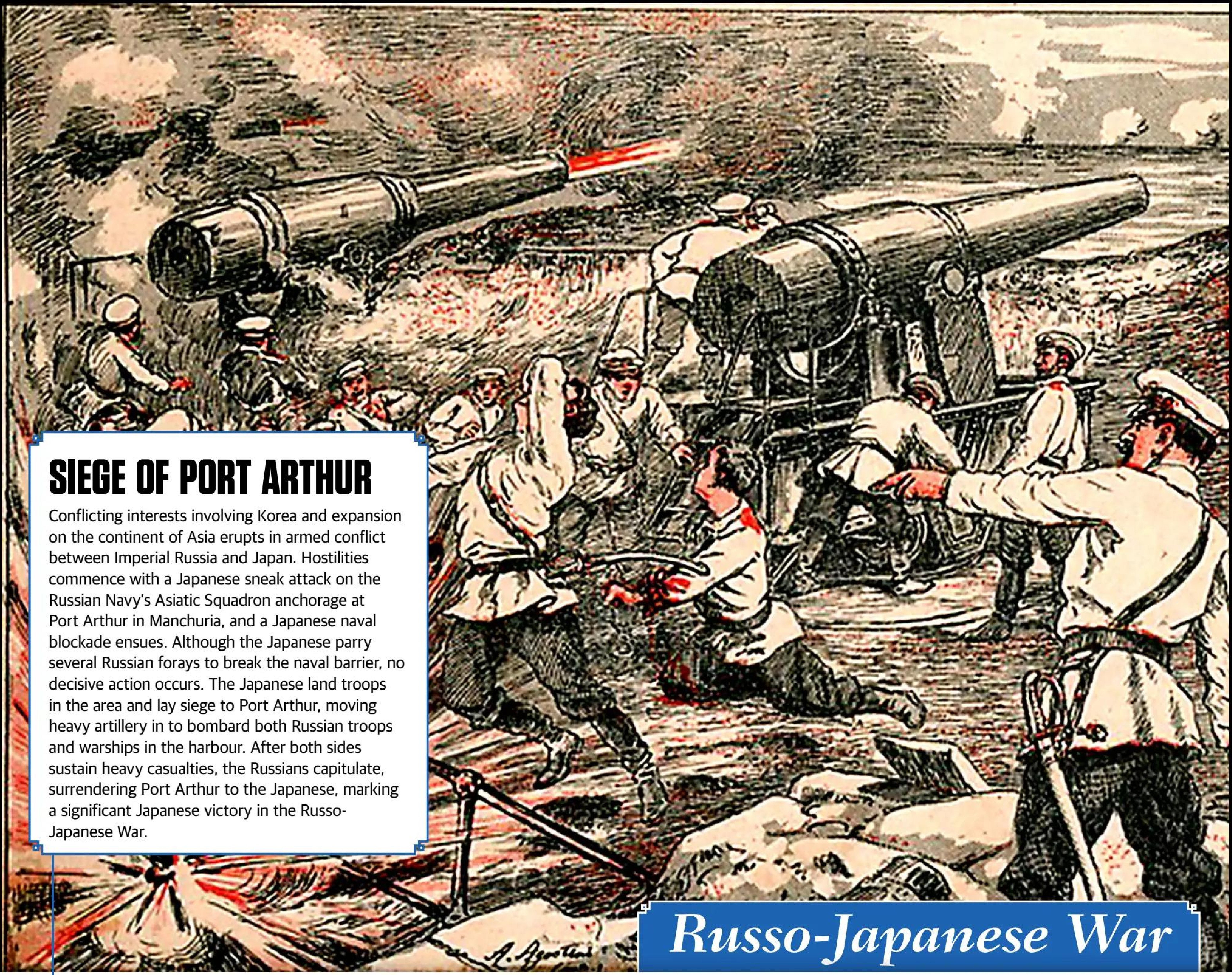
The famed battle ends in stalemate after Russian forces under General Pavel Liprandi mount attacks against vulnerable positions in the British, French, and Ottoman siege lines surrounding the city of Sevastopol. British forces are ordered to leave defensive positions to support Turkish troops under heavy pressure, and the 93rd Highland Regiment of Foot block the charge of Russian cavalry near the port of Balaklava, while the British Heavy Brigade of cavalry put the larger contingent of Russian horsemen to flight. British Field Marshal Lord Raglan then orders the cavalry of the Light Brigade to retrieve artillery pieces captured by the Russians. A mistaken interpretation of the order leads to the fabled 'Charge of the Light Brigade', which suffers heavy casualties.



11 September 1855

END OF THE SIEGE OF SEVASTOPOL

The pivotal engagement of the Crimean War ends with the capture of Sevastopol, the great port that previously served as the base of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. After nearly 11 months, including heavy bombardment of the Russian defences and numerous battles, large and small, the Russians lose control of the southern defences of the city following a major assault on 27 August, rendering remaining positions in the area untenable. The Russians eventually sink their ships in the harbour and evacuate Sevastopol by mid-September. After the fall of the city, British and French commanders choose not to pursue the withdrawing Russians, and the Crimean War rapidly concludes with Russia making territorial concessions in the Danube Delta and Bessarabia.



Russo-Japanese War

1 August 1904 - 2 January 1905

SIEGE OF PORT ARTHUR

Conflicting interests involving Korea and expansion on the continent of Asia erupts in armed conflict between Imperial Russia and Japan. Hostilities commence with a Japanese sneak attack on the Russian Navy's Asiatic Squadron anchorage at Port Arthur in Manchuria, and a Japanese naval blockade ensues. Although the Japanese parry several Russian forays to break the naval barrier, no decisive action occurs. The Japanese land troops in the area and lay siege to Port Arthur, moving heavy artillery in to bombard both Russian troops and warships in the harbour. After both sides sustain heavy casualties, the Russians capitulate, surrendering Port Arthur to the Japanese, marking a significant Japanese victory in the Russo-Japanese War.

20 February - 10 March 1905

BATTLE OF MUKDEN

After three weeks of fighting at Mukden in northeastern China, the Japanese under Field Marshal Ōyama Iwao emerge victorious in the largest land battle of the 20th century prior to World War I. The last major land engagement of the Russo-Japanese War is won after the Japanese commit substantial reinforcements on the Asian continent and Russian General Aleksey Kuropatkin responds to a threat to his right flank with a major realignment of troops that results in chaos. To escape a double envelopment by enemy attacks on both flanks, Kuropatkin initiates a disorganised retirement, abandoning many wounded and suffering 89,000 casualties. Within months the Russo-Japanese War ends essentially on Japan's terms.

27-28 May 1905

BATTLE OF TSUSHIMA

After nearly circumnavigating the globe in its voyage to Asia, the Russian Baltic Fleet is virtually annihilated by a Japanese naval flotilla under Admiral Tōgō Heihachirō. The Russian fleet under Admiral Zinovy Rozhestvensky meets its nemesis in the Tsushima Strait between the Japanese home islands and the Korean Peninsula and falls victim to a classic naval manoeuvre as Togo's modern warships initially cross the Russian "T", bringing broadsides from their heavy guns to bear while the Russians can reply with only a few of their own. In the two-day fight the Russians lose two-thirds of their fleet sunk or captured, while Japanese losses are minimal. The victory is of seismic historical importance as the first instance of a modern Asian navy besting a European power on the seas.

Image source: Wikipedia

BATTLE OF TANNENBERG

An early offensive leads to military disaster as the ill-equipped and unprepared Russian Army is defeated in East Prussia. Just weeks after the outbreak of World War I, Russian General Yakov Zhilinsky launches a two-pronged pincer offensive against the Germans, but the execution of a large encirclement of enemy forces is complicated by sheer distance and difficult terrain. The Germans, under Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg and his capable chief of staff, General Erich Ludendorff, seize an opportunity to counterattack, assaulting the Russian southern pincer in a double envelopment. Russian units collapse in disorganized retreat. More than 90,000 surrender, and 30,000 are killed or wounded. The debacle at Tannenberg sets the tone for the dreadful performance of the Russian Army for the duration of the Great War in the East.

World War I

26-30 August 1914

4 June - 20 September 1916

3 March 1918

BRUSILOV OFFENSIVE

General Aleksey Brusilov leads a massive Russian ground offensive against Austro-Hungarian forces in Carpathia. The Russians achieve initial surprise, and the Austro-Hungarian front collapses on the first day of operations. Thousands of Austrian soldiers abandon their posts and weapons, including a large number of heavy guns later pressed into Russian service. However, when Russian forces to the north fail to occupy the Germans, an Austro-Hungarian appeal for assistance to stem Brusilov's tide is answered. The Germans transfer troops from the north and the Western Front, stabilises the situation and denying the Russians an opportunity to strategically exploit their hard-won gains.

TREATY OF BREST-LITOVSK

Following their seizure of the Russian Government with the 1917 revolution, the Bolsheviks seek peace with Germany and to extricate their country from the tangle of World War I while fighting a civil war against internal opposition to their consolidation of power. The Russian military has experienced numerous catastrophic defeats on the Eastern Front and the people have grown weary. The Germans sense an opportunity and, in fact, facilitated the revolution by permitting Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin to return to Russia from exile in Switzerland and providing financial support to the Bolshevik takeover. The treaty effectively ends Russian participation as an Allied belligerent in exchange for abandoning territorial claims in Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltic States.

World War II

22 June 1941

OPERATION BARBAROSSA

Hitler unleashes the German invasion of the Soviet Union, hurling over 160 divisions on a 2,900-kilometre-wide (1,800-mile) front across the Russian border supported by thousands of aircraft and heavy artillery bombardment. Barbarossa astonishes Soviet Premier Josef Stalin, who has denied ominous signs of an impending German invasion, particularly after the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany concluded a non-aggression pact in August 1939. Early in Barbarossa, the Nazis advance from victory to victory, plunging deep into Soviet territory. However, the thrust toward Moscow is halted just a few miles short of the Soviet capital, while in the north the Germans and their Finnish allies lay siege to the city of Leningrad, an agonizing ordeal for the citizenry that lasts 900 days and costs over 1.5 million lives.

17 July 1942 – 2 February 1943

BATTLE OF STALINGRAD

In the summer of 1942, the Nazis launch Case Blue, an offensive aimed at seizing the oil fields of the Caucasus. However, Hitler modifies the initial order, dividing the thrust into a two-pronged operation with Army Group B diverted to the capture of the industrial centre of Stalingrad on the River Volga. Fighting swirls in the area for months, and the German Sixth Army, under General Friedrich Paulus, is eventually trapped on the outskirts of the city. All attempts to reach the besieged Sixth Army on the ground and to supply it by air fail. In a catastrophic defeat, Paulus surrenders. The Sixth Army is annihilated, with 125,000 killed and 91,000 taken prisoner, while Red Army losses are around 500,000. The Soviet victory at Stalingrad is considered a major turning point of World War II.

2 May 1945

NAZI GERMANY DEFEATED

After a brutal fight for the Nazi capital city of Berlin concludes, Germany is utterly defeated in World War II. The Red Army suffers an estimated million casualties in the capture of Berlin, and the Soviet Union loses approximately 27 million dead in the conflict. Although a surrender instrument is signed between the Nazis and the Western Allies at Reims, France, earlier, the Soviets demand a separate ceremony, which is conducted in Berlin, emphasizing their tremendous contribution to victory in Europe. An agreement assigning occupation zones in Germany to each major Allied nation is enacted, however, the relationship between East and West becomes steadily more contentious, leading to the half century of the Cold War.

Image source: Wikipedia

Nicholas II

Curse of the tsar

NICHOLAS II AND EMPRESS ALEXANDRA SHARED ONE OF HISTORY'S GREAT ROYAL LOVE STORIES, BUT THEY ALSO SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE REVOLUTION THAT DOOMED THE ROMANOV DYNASTY

Written by Greg King

Three months into the Great War, Tsar Nicholas II and Empress Alexandra celebrated their 20th wedding anniversary. On a cold November day back in 1894, when the handsome Nicholas had married Queen Victoria's beautiful Hessian granddaughter, the future had seemed full of promise. Both were young and absolutely devoted to each other.

They had first met in 1884, when Alexandra's sister Elisabeth married Nicholas' uncle Grand Duke Sergei. "We love each other," Nicholas had noted of the childish flirtation. They met again five years later when Alix spent the winter of 1889 with her sister in St. Petersburg. Nicholas was now 21, his expressive blue eyes and slight figure sleek in a dashing military uniform, while the Hessian princess had blossomed into a statuesque 16-year-old with long golden hair and a mind filled with high ideals. They went to skating parties, danced at balls and soon the flirtation had blossomed into serious romance. "My dream is to marry Alix of Hesse," Nicholas had recorded in his diary in 1892.

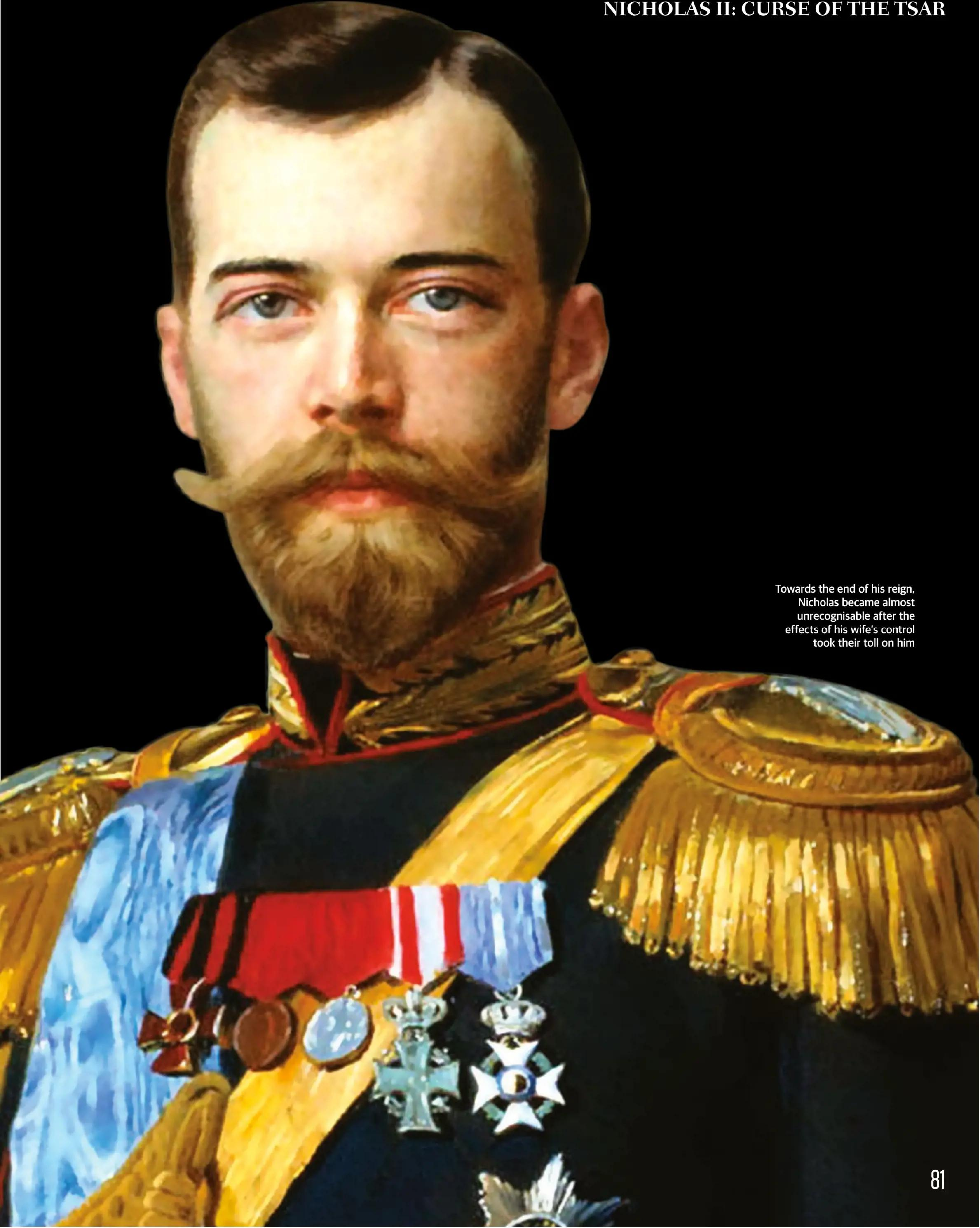
It had taken years of convincing before the Lutheran Alix of Hesse agreed to change her faith and accept Nicholas' proposal: "I cannot go against my conscience," she had written to him in autumn 1893. But Nicholas persisted, and during a family wedding in April 1894, Alix finally relented. The joy of their engagement was short: in the autumn of 1894, Nicholas' father, Tsar Alexander III, died prematurely, thrusting an overwhelmed 26-year-old Nicholas onto the throne. He would marry Alix – who adopted the name Alexandra on converting to Orthodoxy – just a week after burying his father. "I love you," she had assured Nicholas the day after their wedding. "Those three words have my life in them."

That love offered comfort throughout the coming tumultuous years. In quick succession, Alexandra gave birth to four daughters, Olga, Tatiana, Maria and Anastasia, but the male heir that the couple so desperately wanted – and the succession of the imperial throne demanded – eluded the imperial couple.

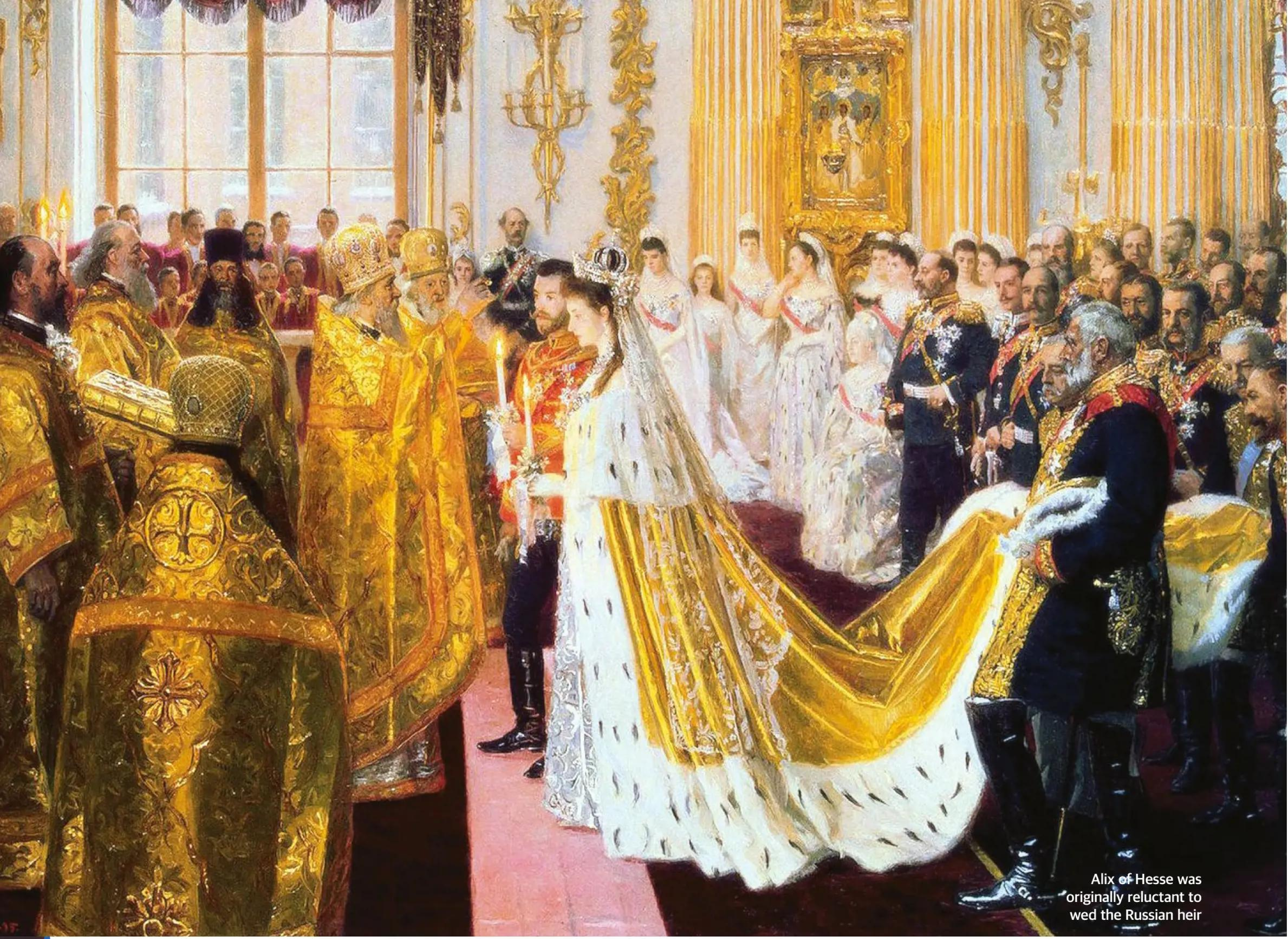
Finally, in 1904, the tsar and his wife were overjoyed when she gave birth to a son named Alexei. However, it took less than six weeks for the first symptoms of haemophilia to appear. Alexandra had known that there was a possibility her son would carry what had become known as 'the royal disease'. The illness, passed down among the descendants of her grandmother, Queen Victoria, was devastating for the empress. There was no medical treatment, and most haemophiliacs suffered terribly before their early deaths. Nicholas accepted his only son's condition with quiet resolve: it was simply another manifestation of "God's will," unseen divine forces that, as Russia's anointed autocratic monarch, he believed dictated absolutely everything in his life.

Alexandra, though, searched for miracles. In 1905, she found her miracle worker in the notorious Grigori Rasputin, a Siberian peasant whose prayers she believed were keeping her son alive. Within a few years the uneducated peasant was openly meddling in politics and – to the dismay of the imperial couple's loyal supporters – rampaging through the capital in a seemingly endless orgy of drunken excess that did incredible damage to the prestige of the imperial throne.

Nicholas had never wanted to be tsar; with his quiet, gentle character, he disliked confrontation and easily gave in to demands from ambitious politicians and family members, setting his country on a disastrous course. War with Japan erupted in 1904, which was brought to an end a year later with Russia's humiliating defeat. Assassinations, pogroms and strikes swelled into a revolution in 1905, and when ultimately faced with open revolt Nicholas was forced to grant his



Towards the end of his reign, Nicholas became almost unrecognisable after the effects of his wife's control took their toll on him



Alix of Hesse was originally reluctant to wed the Russian heir

people a constitution and an elected parliament, the Duma, which effectively ended autocracy in Russia. Eventually, constantly worrying over Alexei's health, disillusion, and continued unrest drove the imperial couple into seclusion and they all but disappeared, hiding behind the walls of their luxurious palaces, enjoying their happy family life together but largely sacrificing the ceremonial duties that had once made the Russian court one of the most brilliant in the world. It proved an unpopular decision.

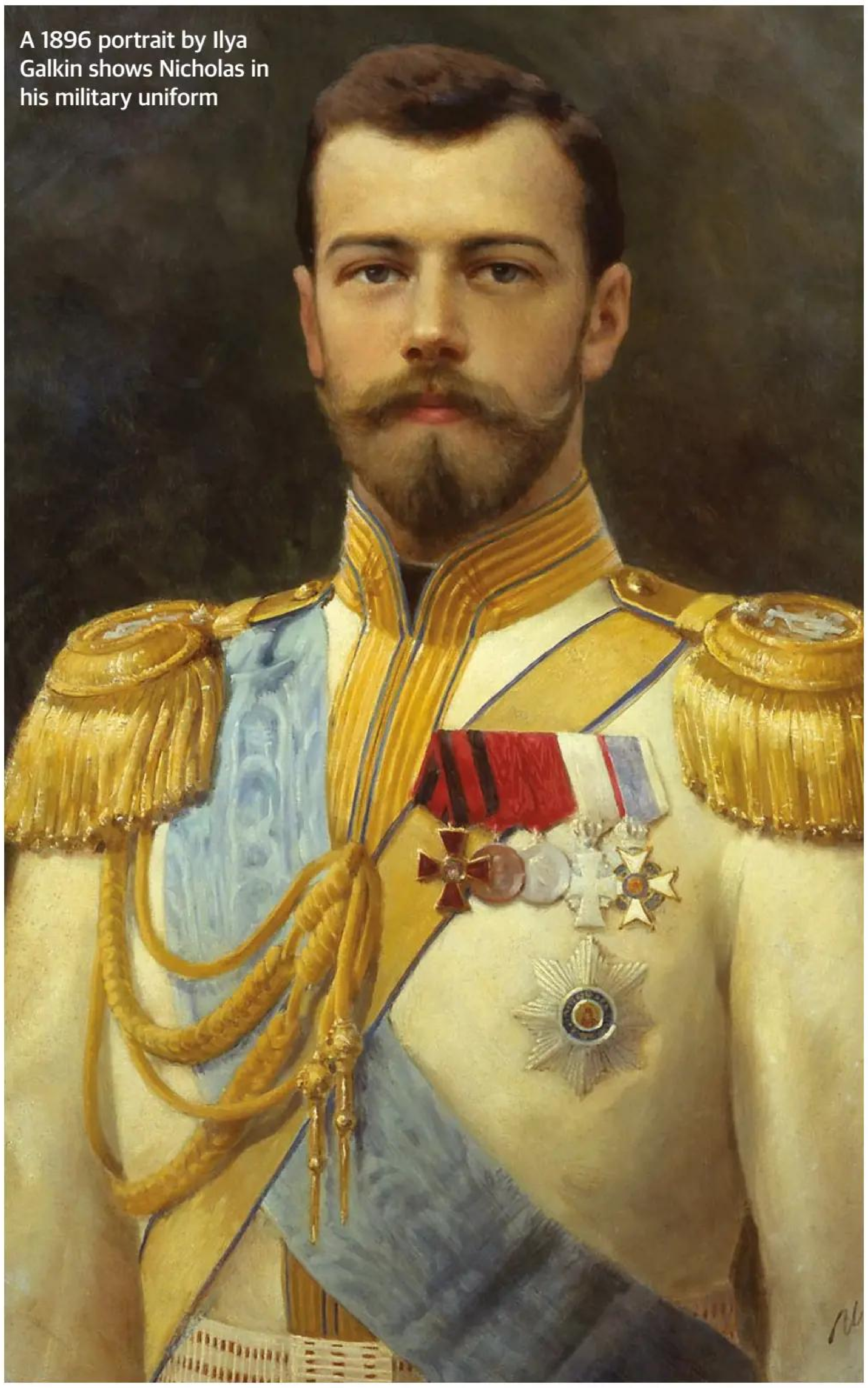
Much was forgiven when World War I erupted in August 1914 and millions of Russians marched off to join their British and French allies. The empire had never seemed as united as it did the day Nicholas II declared war on Germany. Tens of thousands of his subjects had cheered his appearance at St. Petersburg's Winter Palace and lustily sang the imperial anthem, 'God Save The Tsar'. Nicholas patriotically changed the name of the imperial capital from the Germanic St. Petersburg to the Slavic Petrograd and began spending weeks at Stavka, the Russian military headquarters some 1,290 kilometres (800 miles) away. Alexandra also joined the war effort together with her eldest daughters Olga and Tatiana. She trained as a Red Cross nurse and worked in a hospital for wounded officers, assisting in operations and tending to the soldiers. Their efforts were well-intentioned, but many thought that, by changing bandages and amputating limbs, the empress of Russia was debasing her position.

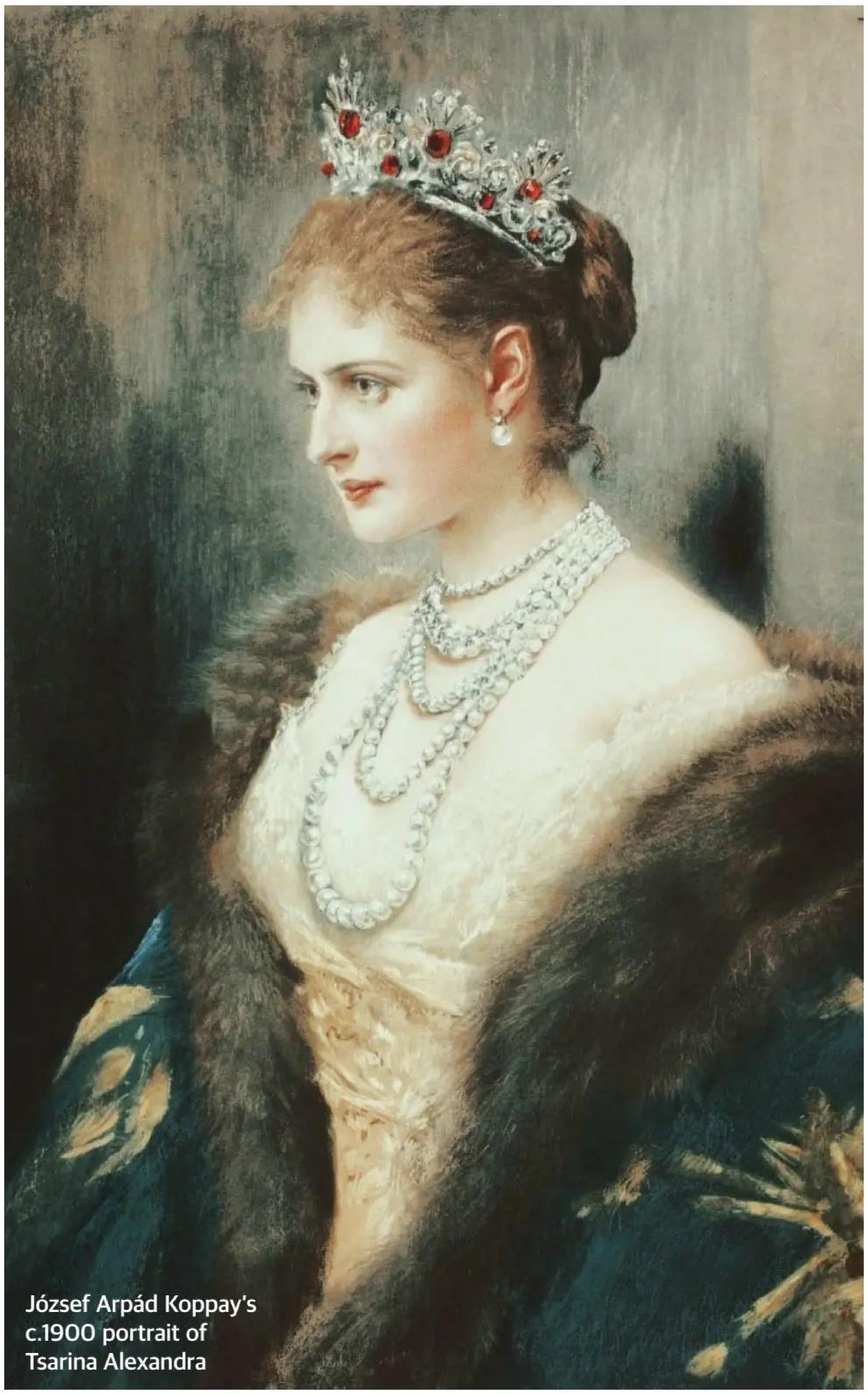
An early Russian offensive in East Prussia quickly devolved into disastrous defeat, and it soon became apparent that the Russian Empire was hopelessly short of adequate troop transport and munitions. At one point soldiers were even rationed to three bullets a day. In early 1915, Russian soldiers steadily advanced against the Austrians in Galicia, but the gains were temporary. An offensive launched by the Central Powers in May drove tsarist soldiers back amid devastating casualties.

By summer, nearly 1.4 million Russian soldiers had been killed or wounded, with nearly 1 million more taken as prisoners of war. In August, Warsaw fell to the advancing Germans. Russia was forced into retreat and its army was completely demoralised.

Alexandra used the crisis to campaign against her husband's cousin Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaevich, who led the army as supreme commander. The grand duke had made no secret of his distaste for Rasputin, which earned the empress' wrath. In letters to her husband she insisted that the grand duke was always plotting, attempting to promote himself and diminish the emperor's prestige. She urged her husband to remove the grand duke from power and assume supreme command himself. The grand duke, she repeatedly warned her husband, was "our friend's [Rasputin's] enemy, and that brings bad luck". Nicholas II needed little persuasion. He believed that his place was with his army. However symbolic, his presence at the front, he thought, would help to lift morale and turn the tide.

Nicholas had no practical experience in military tactics or leadership, and his decision to remove Nikolaevich from command horrified many. Ten of the 13 members of the Council


A 1896 portrait by Ilya Galkin shows Nicholas in his military uniform


József Arpád Koppay's c.1900 portrait of Tsarina Alexandra

> *"Food and fuel were scarce. Long lines of the tsar's subjects filled the streets, standing in frigid weather hoping for a bag of flour or heating oil"*

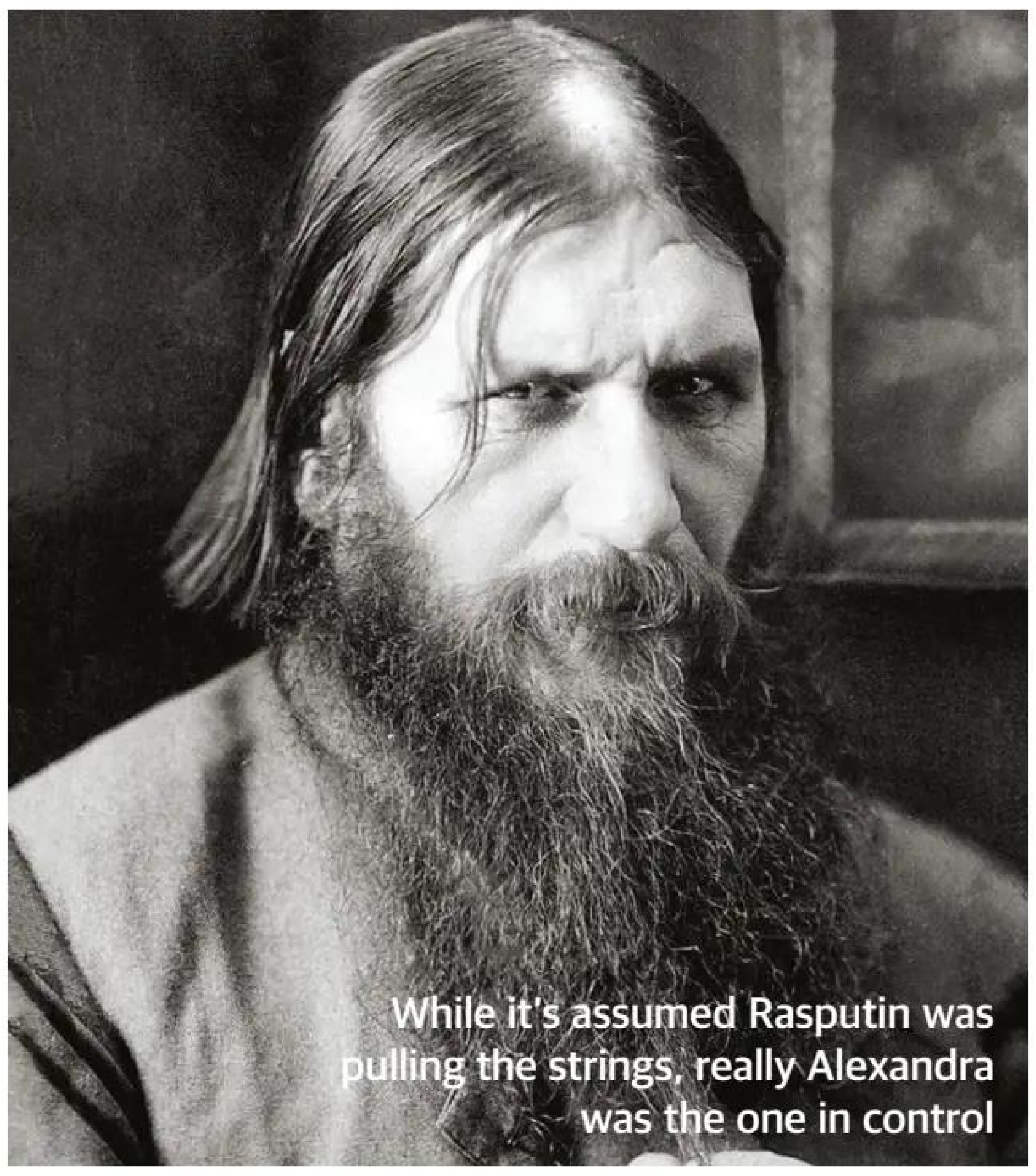
of Ministers submitted their resignations in protest, but an angry Nicholas simply dismissed their concerns. The emperor's mother, Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna, was in total despair. "This is not at all like Nicky!" she cried. "He is lovable, he is honest, he is good." Instead she put all of the blame at the feet of her daughter-in-law, Alexandra, "It is all her work."

Nicholas left for Stavka to assume supreme command of the Russian forces carrying a triumphant letter from his wife, who assured him that Rasputin had blessed the decision. "Our friend's prayers arise night and day for you to Heaven," she wrote to her husband, "and God will hear them. It is the beginning of the glory of your reign. Our friend said so and I absolutely believe it." In fact, it was the beginning of the end, but neither Nicholas nor Alexandra perceived the dangers that lay ahead.

With Nicholas at army headquarters, Alexandra soon became the face of imperial power. The emperor made governmental decisions, but those decisions were often influenced and coerced by his wife. Alexandra assured Nicholas that she had "trousers on, unseen," and was ready to lead the government in his absence. Armed with undying earnestness and convinced of the superiority of her intellect, she plunged forward in an effort to be "useful".

Alexandra's understanding of her adopted homeland was abysmal. "Russia loves to feel the whip," she insisted to Nicholas, "it's in their nature." She would say that the country was fortunate to have "a real anointed sovereign". She never accepted the fact her husband had been forced to end the autocracy in 1905 and continually warned Nicholas that a constitutional government, with a ministry responsible to the people, not to the throne,

A 1913 group portrait of the tsar and his family



While it's assumed Rasputin was pulling the strings, really Alexandra was the one in control

would "be Russia's ruin". The tsar should "be more decided and self-confident" and "show your own mind". He should be "Peter the Great, Ivan the Terrible, Emperor Paul – crush them all under you!" Yet she protested whenever Nicholas voiced an opinion that was different than her own. She didn't want him to be more autocratic; she wanted him to be more obedient. "The emperor unfortunately is weak," she said, "but I am not and I intend to be firm."

The tsar had lived with such rebukes for two decades. Alexandra had never been shy in warning him of his perceived character deficiencies and prodding him to become the man she wished him to be. Though well meant, she actually undermined her husband's fragile self-esteem. By the last weeks of his reign, Nicholas had taken to repeatedly signing off his letters to his wife with "Your poor little weak-willed hubby". In attempting to reshape her husband according to her own desires, Alexandra made Nicholas entirely dependent on her and her unwavering opinions.

A deadly self-delusion soon took hold. Alexandra scattered Rasputin's name throughout her letters, but she was the dominant partner in their relationship. The hysterical empress in thrall to the Siberian peasant who dictated government appointments is a myth. Rasputin was crafty enough to sense what Alexandra wanted and simply parroted back her own views when quizzed on politicians and policies. She then used Rasputin's name to wrap her opinions in a mantle of divine sanction to her husband. It all meshed with emotional ideas that her marriage

ВѢЧНАЯ ПАМЯТЬ
ПОГИБШИМЪ
БОРЦАМЪ ЗА СВОБОДУ.

A mourning ceremony for victims of the February Revolution, Russia, 1917

The February Revolution

RUSSIA QUICKLY TURNED ON ITS EMPEROR AFTER COLD-BLOODED MURDER DROVE HIS SOLDIERS TO JOIN THE STRIKERS AND REVOLT

Disgust and desperation drove the Russian Revolution. A general strike brought angry workers opposing the war together with disillusioned students and the dispossessed on Petrograd's streets in February 1917. The first signs of trouble came when Cossacks, called out to break up the demonstrations, refused to turn their whips on the wretches waiting for food. By the end of the month, with the capital paralysed, Nicholas II ordered General Nicholas Khabalov, military commander of Petrograd to "end the disorders". The general's troops opened fire on the crowds, killing 169 people and injuring thousands. The peace, won by terror, was illusory. Soldiers, sickened by having shot the demonstrators, began to revolt, murdering their officers and declaring allegiance to the revolution. One by one, the elite Imperial Guards Regiments deserted as chaos swept the city. Mobs burned buildings and ransacked shops in search of food, and across the capital crowds attacked police and angrily tore down the double-headed eagle emblems of the Romanov dynasty. By 2 March, with government officials openly siding with the revolt, the Duma declared itself head of a Provisional Government. It took only nine days for the revolution to succeed.

was some sort of religious mission, but in reality it was an abusive mixture of faith and politics. The tragedy is that Alexandra never realised what she was doing, and no-one was strong enough to stop her.

Officials came, went, and were reshuffled for no apparent reason in a shocking and disreputable display that left the country paralysed. In 18 months – from September 1915 to the Revolution – Russia had four prime ministers, five ministers of the interior, four ministers of agriculture, four ministers of religion, three ministers of war, and three foreign ministers. Nicholas seemed unable to resist his wife's suggestions, which were often little short of demands, even when he knew her proposals would have catastrophic consequences for the country.

Such was the case with Alexander Protopopov, who became minister of the interior in September 1916. Protopopov mumbled to himself, twitched, and shouted obscenities at the voices in his head. Suffering from syphilis and slowly going insane, he had already been confined to asylums, but nevertheless, Alexandra wanted him appointed to the second-highest office in the land. When Nicholas resisted, she used Rasputin's name:

"He likes our friend for four years, and that says much about a man," she wrote to Nicholas, yet the tsar was uncertain. "Our friend's ideas about men are sometimes queer," he warned. "All these changes exhaust the head. They happen much too often". Alexandra refused to back down, and Nicholas gave in against his better judgment.

> *"Accusations of treason fell across the Russian capital like the first flakes of snow blanketing Petrograd in the autumn of 1916"*

> "The empress, it was said, believed herself to be a second Catherine the Great and, like her, planned to kill her husband and seize his throne"

Accusations of treason fell across the Russian capital like the first flakes of snow blanketing Petrograd in the autumn of 1916. The country was spiralling into chaos. Discontent in the army, the endless succession of ministerial appointments, moral disintegration among the Orthodox hierarchy, and the shadow of Rasputin all coalesced into a growing hatred against the Romanov dynasty in general, and Nicholas – especially Alexandra – in particular. Watching the latest newsreels of the imperial couple in a cinema, one British visitor was shocked when the audience erupted in hisses when the empress appeared on screen.

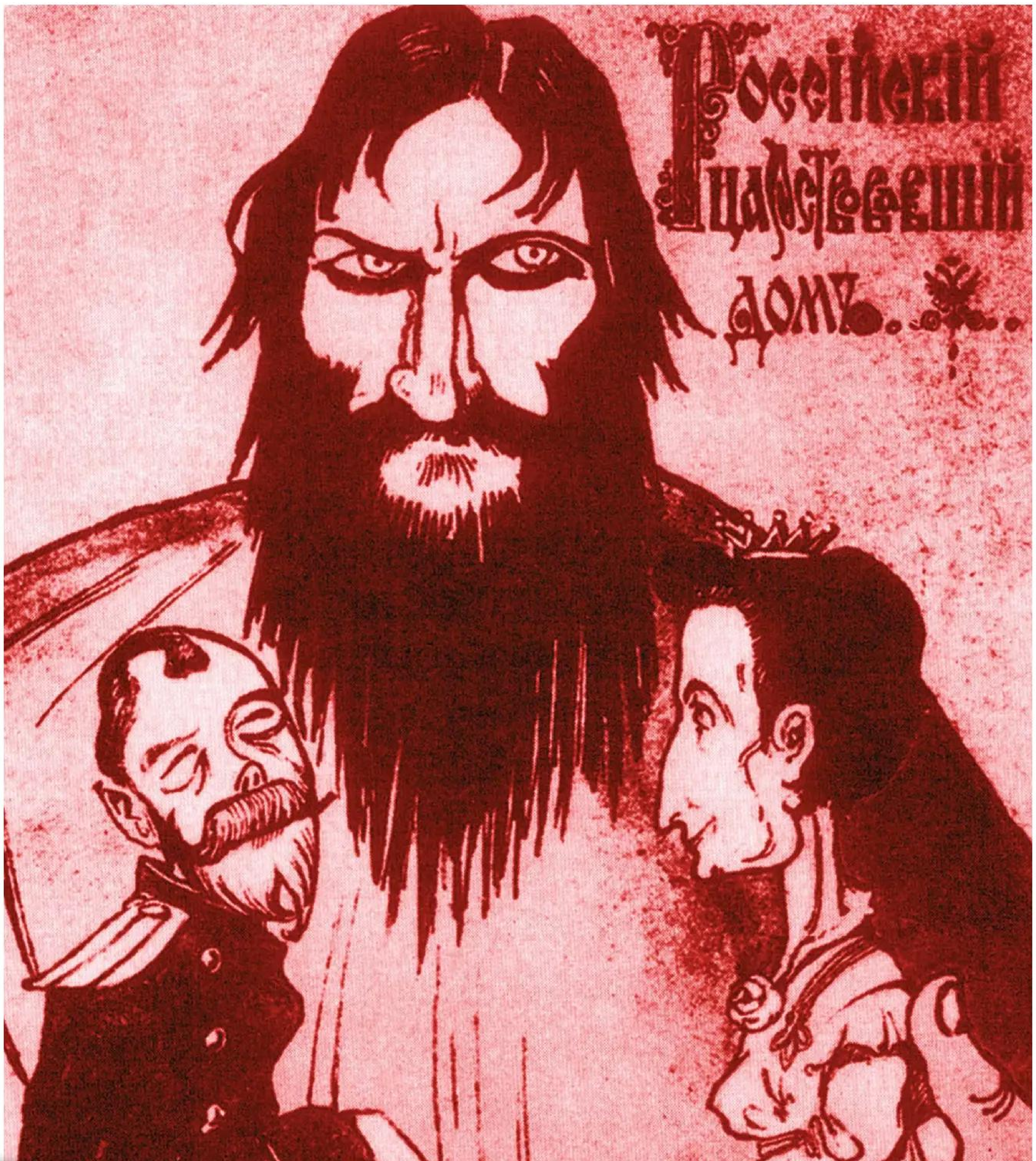
No rumour was too bizarre. Before her marriage Alexandra had been a German princess, and so many Russians openly questioned her loyalties and spread tales that she was secretly working to negotiate a separate peace with her cousin Kaiser Wilhelm II. The empress, it was said, believed herself to be a second Catherine the Great – another German princess come to Russia – and, like her, planned to kill her husband and seize his throne for herself. Obscene pamphlets and cartoons showed the empress and Rasputin; people believed that he slept with Alexandra and her four young daughters. "Rasputin, Rasputin, Rasputin – it was like a refrain," recalled Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna. "The word 'revolution' was everywhere."

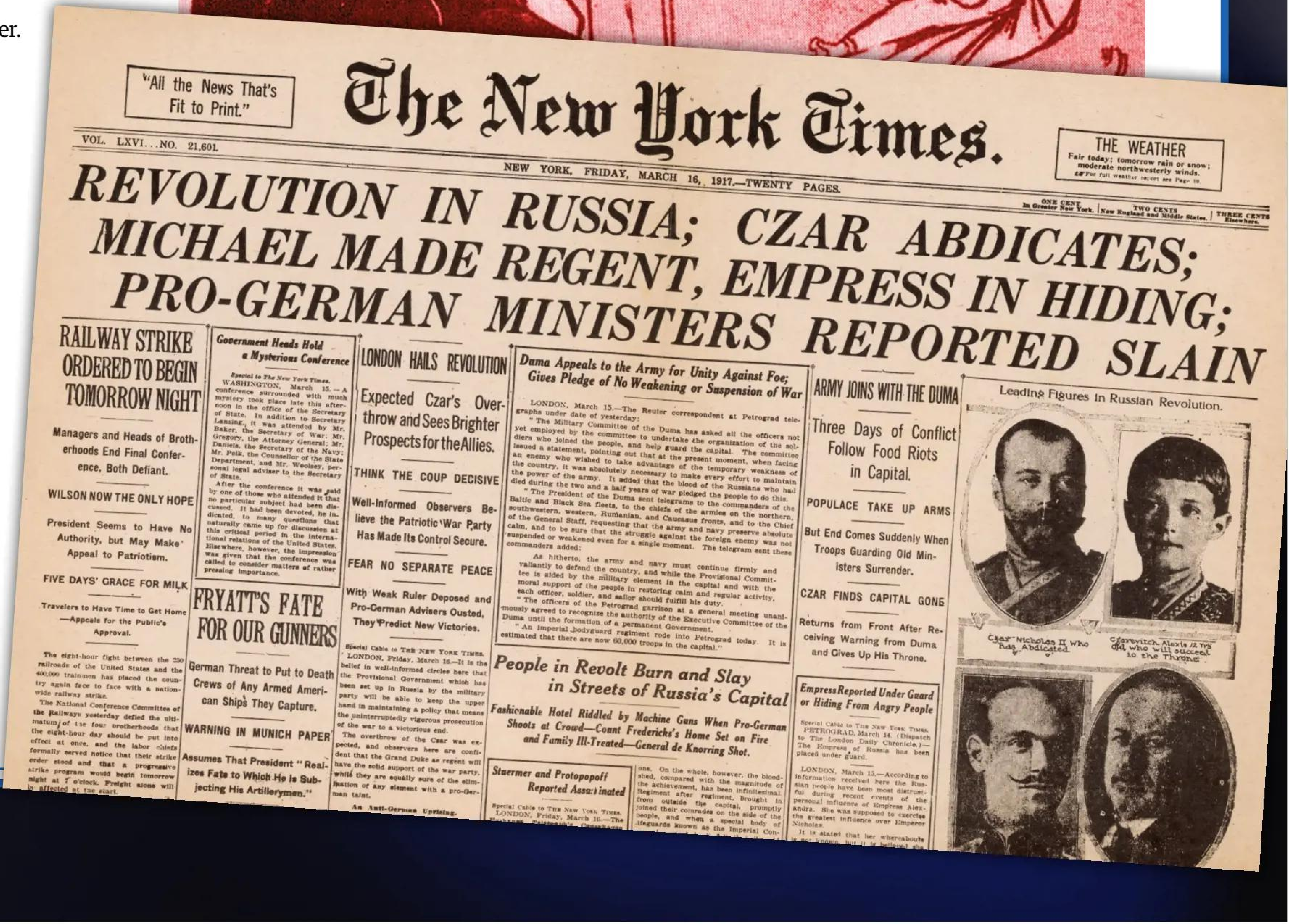
Relatives warned of the impending crisis, but to no avail. Three grand dukes went to Nicholas that autumn imploring him to grant a responsible ministry. But such an idea was beyond Nicholas' comprehension: "I'd have to forget everything in my life," he once said on hearing such a proposal. "I cannot make a decision that goes against my own conscience. If I did so, I would be unable to believe that I was responsible before God." The tsar was equally unreceptive to those who begged him

to ignore the empress' advice. "I believe no one but my wife!" was his cold response. When Alexandra's sister Elisabeth visited the empress in December, she warned that Rasputin was destroying the dynasty. "Remember the fate of Louis XVI!" the grand duchess cried. But the empress arose and told her to leave. "She drove me away like a dog," Elisabeth later wept.

On the morning of 17 December 1916, the telephone beside Alexandra's chaise in her famous Mauve Boudoir jingled to life. The empress was stunned: Rasputin was missing. "Our friend has disappeared!" she wrote to her husband at headquarters. The previous evening, Rasputin had gone out with Prince Felix Yusupov, one of Russia's wealthiest aristocrats and husband of Nicholas II's only Russian niece. The prince denied that he had anything to do with the man's disappearance, but before long the story unravelled in all its grisly, theatrical detail. After having been poisoned, shot and stabbed, Rasputin had been hurled into a frozen river. His death came too late to make any difference, but it did have one unfortunate and unsuspected effect: it divided the imperial couple from their censorious relatives and drove them further into suspicious isolation.

Officials who met Nicholas in the weeks after the murder found the tsar unrecognisable. His cheeks were hollow, his eyes were listless and he was unable to answer even the simplest of questions that were put to him. For 22 years he had been assailed from all sides with advice, warnings, and orders that had left him close to a nervous breakdown, while doses of cocaine, hashish, and opium for toothaches and stomach pains increasingly left him in a haze. "He is no longer seriously interested in anything," complained one courtier. "He has become quite apathetic. He goes through his daily routine like an automaton." The French ambassador left his last meeting convinced that the tsar "has lost





"All the News That's Fit to Print."

The New York Times.

THE WEATHER
Fair today; tomorrow rain or snow; moderate northwesterly winds.
For full weather report see Page 19.

VOL. LXVI...NO. 21,601.

NEW YORK, FRIDAY, MARCH 16, 1917.—TWENTY PAGES.

ONE CENT In Greater New York. | TWO CENTS New England and Middle States. | THREE CENTS Elsewhere.

REVOLUTION IN RUSSIA; CZAR ABDICATES; MICHAEL MADE REGENT, EMPRESS IN HIDING; PRO-GERMAN MINISTERS REPORTED SLAIN

RAILWAY STRIKE ORDERED TO BEGIN TOMORROW NIGHT

Managers and Heads of Brotherhoods End Final Conference, Both Defiant.

WILSON NOW THE ONLY HOPE

President Seems to Have No Authority, but May Make Appeal to Patriotism.

FIVE DAYS' GRACE FOR MILK

Travelers to Have Time to Get Home—Appeals for the Public's Approval.

The eight-hour fight between the 250 railroads of the United States and the 400,000 trainmen has placed the country again face to face with a nationwide railway strike.

The National Conference Committee of the Railways yesterday defied the ultimatum of the four brotherhoods that the eight-hour day should be put into effect at once, and the labor chiefs formally served notice that their strike order stood and that a progressive strike program would begin tomorrow night at 7 o'clock. Freight alone will be affected at the start.

Government Heads Hold a Mysterious Conference

Special to The New York Times.
WASHINGTON, March 15.—A conference surrounded with much mystery took place late this afternoon in the office of the Secretary of State. In addition to Secretary Lansing, it was attended by Mr. Baker, the Secretary of War; Mr. Gregory, the Attorney General; Mr. Daniels, the Secretary of the Navy; Mr. Polk, the Counsellor of the State Department, and Mr. Woolsey, personal legal adviser to the Secretary of State.

After the conference it was said by one of those who attended it that no particular subject had been discussed. It had been devoted, he indicated, to many questions that naturally came up for discussion at this critical period in the international relations of the United States. Elsewhere, however, the impression was given that the conference was called to consider matters of rather pressing importance.

FRYATT'S FATE FOR OUR GUNNERS

German Threat to Put to Death Crews of Any Armed American Ships They Capture.

WARNING IN MUNICH PAPER

Assumes That President "Realizes Fate to Which He Is Subjecting His Artillerymen."

LONDON HAILS REVOLUTION

Expected Czar's Overthrow and Sees Brighter Prospects for the Allies.

THINK THE COUP DECISIVE

Well-Informed Observers Believe the Patriotic War Party Has Made Its Control Secure.

FEAR NO SEPARATE PEACE

With Weak Ruler Deposed and Pro-German Advisers Ousted, They Predict New Victories.

Special Cable to THE NEW YORK TIMES.
LONDON, Friday, March 16.—It is the belief in well-informed circles here that the Provisional Government which has been set up in Russia by the military party will be able to keep the upper hand in maintaining a policy that means the uninterruptedly vigorous prosecution of the war to a victorious end.

The overthrow of the Czar was expected, and observers here are confident that the Grand Duke as regent will have the solid support of the war party, while they are equally sure of the elimination of any element with a pro-German taint.

An Anti-German Uprising.

Duma Appeals to the Army for Unity Against Foe; Gives Pledge of No Weakening or Suspension of War

LONDON, March 15.—The Reuter correspondent at Petrograd telegraphs under date of yesterday:

"The Military Committee of the Duma has asked all the officers not yet employed by the committee to undertake the organization of the soldiers who joined the people, and help guard the capital. The committee issued a statement, pointing out that at the present moment, when facing an enemy who wished to take advantage of the temporary weakness of the country, it was absolutely necessary to make every effort to maintain the power of the army. It added that the blood of the Russians who had died during the two and a half years of war pledged the people to do this.

"The President of the Duma sent telegrams to the commanders of the Baltic and Black Sea fleets, to the chiefs of the armies on the northern, southwestern, western, Rumanian, and Caucasus fronts, and to the Chief of the General Staff, requesting that the army and navy preserve absolute calm, and to be sure that the struggle against the foreign enemy was not suspended or weakened even for a single moment. The telegram sent these commanders added:

As hitherto, the army and navy must continue firmly and valiantly to defend the country, and while the Provisional Committee is aided by the military element in the capital and with the moral support of the people in restoring calm and regular activity, each officer, soldier, and sailor should fulfill his duty.

"The officers of the Petrograd garrison at a general meeting unanimously agreed to recognize the authority of the Executive Committee of the Duma until the formation of a permanent Government.

"An Imperial bodyguard regiment rode into Petrograd today. It is estimated that there are now 60,000 troops in the capital."

People in Revolt Burn and Slay in Streets of Russia's Capital

Fashionable Hotel Riddled by Machine Guns When Pro-German Shoots at Crowd—Count Fredericks's Home Set on Fire and Family Ill-Treated—General de Knorring Shot.

Stuermer and Protopopoff Reported Assassinated

Special Cable to THE NEW YORK TIMES.
LONDON, Friday, March 16.—The

ons. On the whole, however, the bloodshed, compared with the magnitude of the achievement, has been infinitesimal. Regiment after regiment, brought in from outside the capital, promptly joined their comrades on the side of the people, and when a special body of safeguards known as the Imperial Con-

ARMY JOINS WITH THE DUMA

Three Days of Conflict Follow Food Riots in Capital.

POPULACE TAKE UP ARMS

But End Comes Suddenly When Troops Guarding Old Ministers Surrender.

CZAR FINDS CAPITAL GONE

Returns from Front After Receiving Warning from Duma and Gives Up His Throne.

Empress Reported Under Guard or Hiding From Angry People

Special Cable to THE NEW YORK TIMES.
PETROGRAD, March 14. (Dispatch to The London Daily Chronicle.)—The Empress of Russia has been placed under guard.

LONDON, March 15.—According to information received here the Russian people have been most distrustful during recent events of the personal influence of Empress Alexandra. She was supposed to exercise the greatest influence over Emperor Nicholas.

It is stated that her whereabouts

Leading Figures in Russian Revolution.

Czar Nicholas II who has Abdicated

Czarevitch Alexis 12 yrs old, who will succeed to the Throne

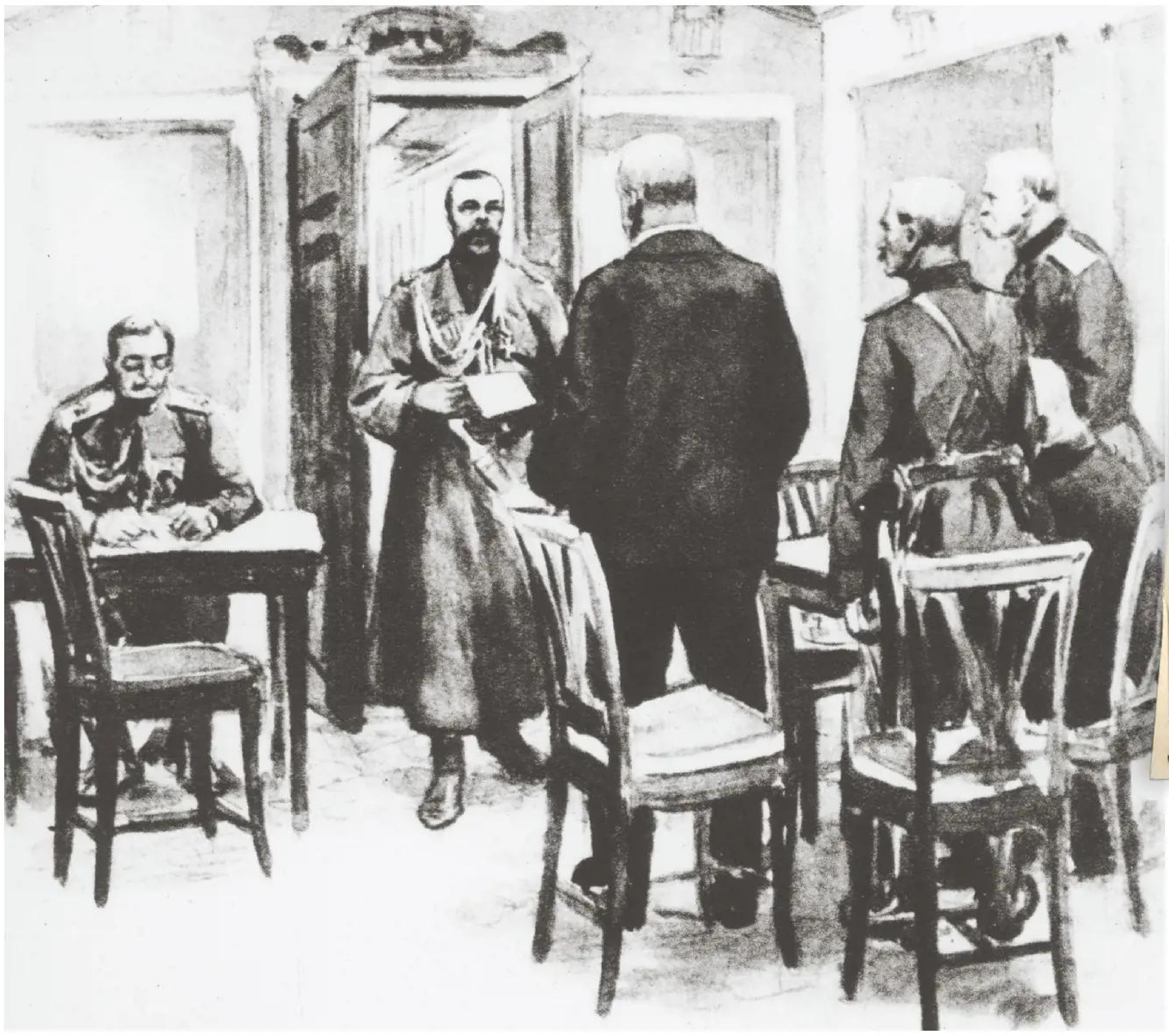
OPPOSITE TOP During the war, the empress and her daughters trained as nurses for the Red Cross and worked in a hospital for wounded soldiers, assisting operations and amputations

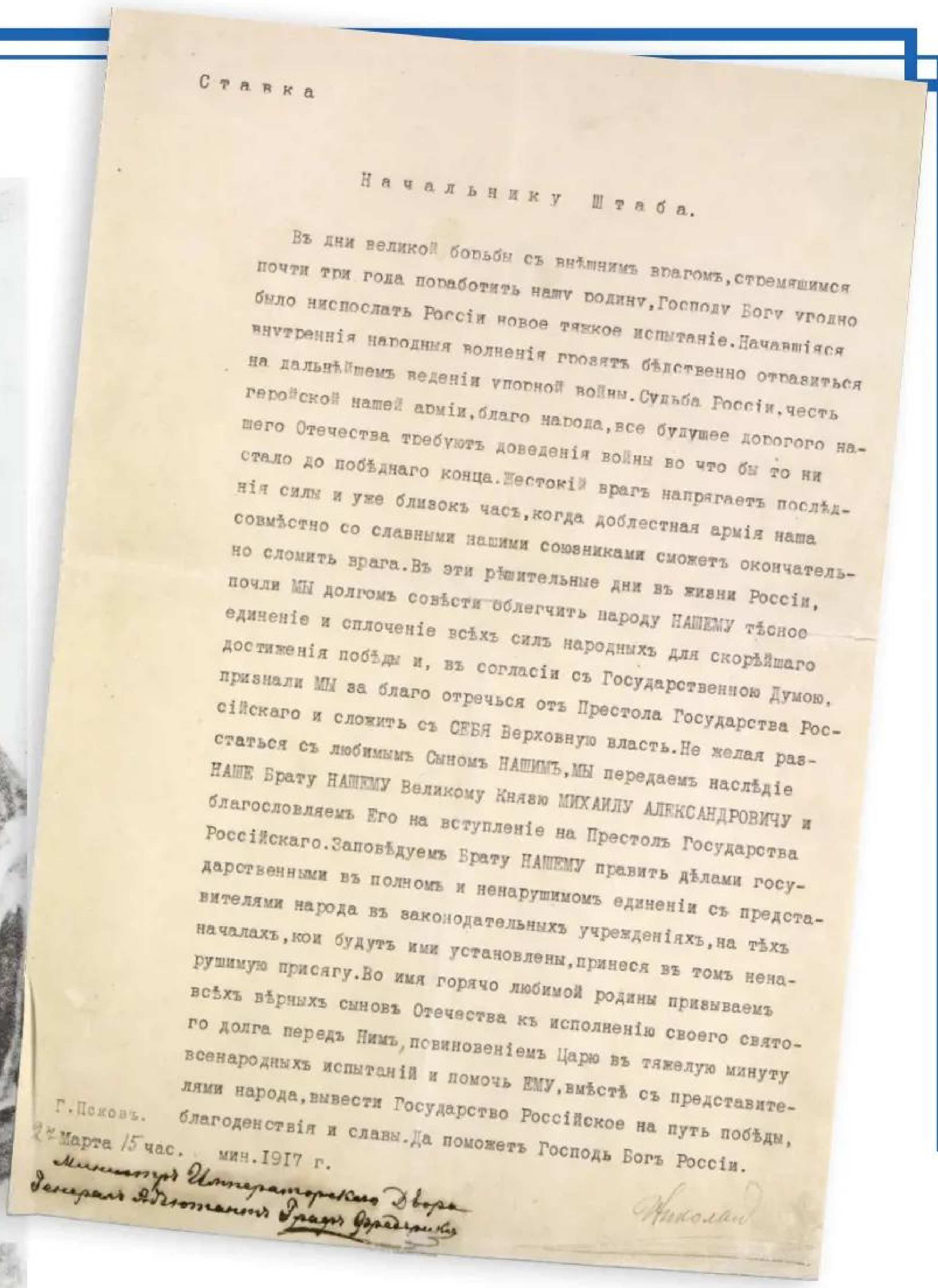
OPPOSITE Empress Alexandra and Nicholas II on board the Imperial yacht, *Standart*, at Reval, Russia

ABOVE RIGHT A contemporary caricature of the royal couple in the clutches of Rasputin

RIGHT The front page of the *New York Times* announces the success of the Russian Revolution and the abdication of Nicholas II

Looking gaunt, Nicholas II is photographed here in the grounds of Alexander Palace weeks after his abdication in 1917





Ставка

Начальнику Штаба.

Въ дни великой борьбы съ внѣшнимъ врагомъ,стремящимся почти три года поработить нашу родину,Господу Богу угодно было ниспослать Россіи новое тяжкое испытаніе.Начавшіяся внутреннія народныя волненія грозятъ бѣдственно отразиться на дальнѣйшемъ веденіи упорной войны.Судьба Россіи,честь геройской нашей арміи,благо народа,все будущее дорогого нашего Отечества требуютъ доведенія войны во что бы то ни стало до побѣднаго конца.Жестокій врагъ напрягаетъ послѣднія силы и уже близокъ часъ,когда доблестная армія наша совмѣстно со славными нашими союзниками сможетъ окончательно сломить врага.Въ эти рѣшительные дни въ жизни Россіи, почли МЫ долгомъ совѣсти облегчить народу НАШЕМУ тѣсное единеніе и сплоченіе всѣхъ силъ народныхъ для скорѣйшаго достиженія побѣды и, въ согласіи съ Государственною Думою, признали МЫ за благо отречься отъ Престола Государства Россійскаго и сложить съ СЕБЯ Верховную власть.Не желая разстаться съ любимымъ Сыномъ НАШИМЪ,МЫ передаемъ наслѣдіе НАШЕ Брату НАШЕМУ Великому Князю МИХАИЛУ АЛЕКСАНДРОВИЧУ и благословляемъ Его на вступленіе на Престолъ Государства Россійскаго.Заповѣдуемъ Брату НАШЕМУ править дѣлами государственными въ полномъ и ненарушимомъ единеніи съ представителями народа въ законодательныхъ учрежденіяхъ,на тѣхъ началахъ,кои будутъ ими установлены,принеся въ томъ ненарушимую присягу.Во имя горячо любимой родины призываемъ всѣхъ вѣрныхъ сыновъ Отечества къ исполненію своего святого долга передъ Нимъ,повиновеніемъ Царю въ тяжелую минуту всенародныхъ испытаній и помочь ЕМУ,вмѣстѣ съ представителями народа,вывести Государство Россійское на путь побѣды, благоденствія и славы.Да поможетъ Господь Богъ Россіи.

Г.Псковъ.
2 Марта 15 час. мин.1917 г.

Николай

Министръ Императорскаго Двора
Генералъ-Адъютантъ Графъ Фредерикс

ABOVE Nicholas II's signed Act of Abdication from March 1917

LEFT Tsar Nicholas presents his abdication in a railway car in Pskov

Nicholas II's abdication

AFTER LOSING THE SUPPORT OF HIS GENERALS, TSAR NICHOLAS II ABDICATED IN FAVOUR OF THE WRONG PERSON, BRINGING TO AN END THE 304-YEAR REIGN OF HIS FAMILY'S DYNASTY

Nicholas II had lived through strikes and demonstrations before; viewing them as treasonous, he had managed to somehow ride out the difficulties, and he had expected to do so again in 1917. Isolated at military headquarters, he had only intermittent and conflicting news of the disorders in Petrograd.

In early 1917, a telegram from Mikhail Rodzianko, president of the Duma, warned of "anarchy in the capital," but a letter from Alexandra assured her husband that "everyone remains devoted to you". Nicholas therefore decided that the president was exaggerating the severity of the situation, saying, "That fat Rodzianko has sent me more nonsense to which I shall not bother to reply." But by the next day, when Rodzianko, the State Council and Alexandra all warned that the situation was serious, Nicholas finally decided to return to his capital. His train took a circuitous route north and, hoping to avoid rebels, was diverted to the town of Pskov. Here, on the afternoon of 2 March, he learned that the new Provisional Government, as well as the army high command, was demanding his abdication. Having lost the support of his generals, not wanting to impede the war effort, and unwilling to launch his country into a civil war, the tsar – tired, disillusioned and mentally exhausted – agreed to renounce the throne.

Initially he abdicated in favour of his 12-year-old son, Alexei, but he changed his mind after considering the haemophiliac boy's fragile condition. Instead, he abdicated in favour of his brother Grand Duke Michael. This was illegal – not even the tsar had the right to renounce the succession rights of his heir – but no one challenged him. At 11.40 p.m. that night, Nicholas signed an abdication manifesto that ended with the words, "May the Lord God save Russia." In his diary, he recorded bitterly, "All around me I see treachery, cowardice and deceit." The next day, when Grand Duke Michael refused to accept the throne under such dangerous circumstances, the 304-year-old Romanov dynasty came to an end.

faith in his mission, and that he has abdicated inwardly and is now resigned to disaster".

People whispered of conspiracy. It was said that guards units would soon arrest Alexandra, depose Nicholas and declare the young Alexei as the new tsar of Russia. Members of the government pondered seizing the tsar's train and forcing him to abdicate in favour of his son. When Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna begged her son to send Alexandra away so she could no longer interfere with political affairs, Nicholas abruptly dismissed her and she subsequently fled to Kiev. Grand dukes sat in cafés openly declaring that to save the dynasty from ruin the tsar would have to be sacrificed.

On 23 February, Nicholas left his capital to return to headquarters. Food and fuel were scarce. Long lines of the tsar's desperate subjects filled the streets of Petrograd, standing in frigid weather hoping to collect a bag of flour or a container of heating oil. Nearly 100,000 striking factory workers soon joined the freezing masses, shouting, "Down with the war! Down with the autocracy!"

Over the next week, discontent swelled into revolution. By the time Nicholas returned to his palace it was as a prisoner, unknowingly having doomed himself and his family to a bloody end in a Siberian cellar at the hands of the Bolsheviks just over a year later.

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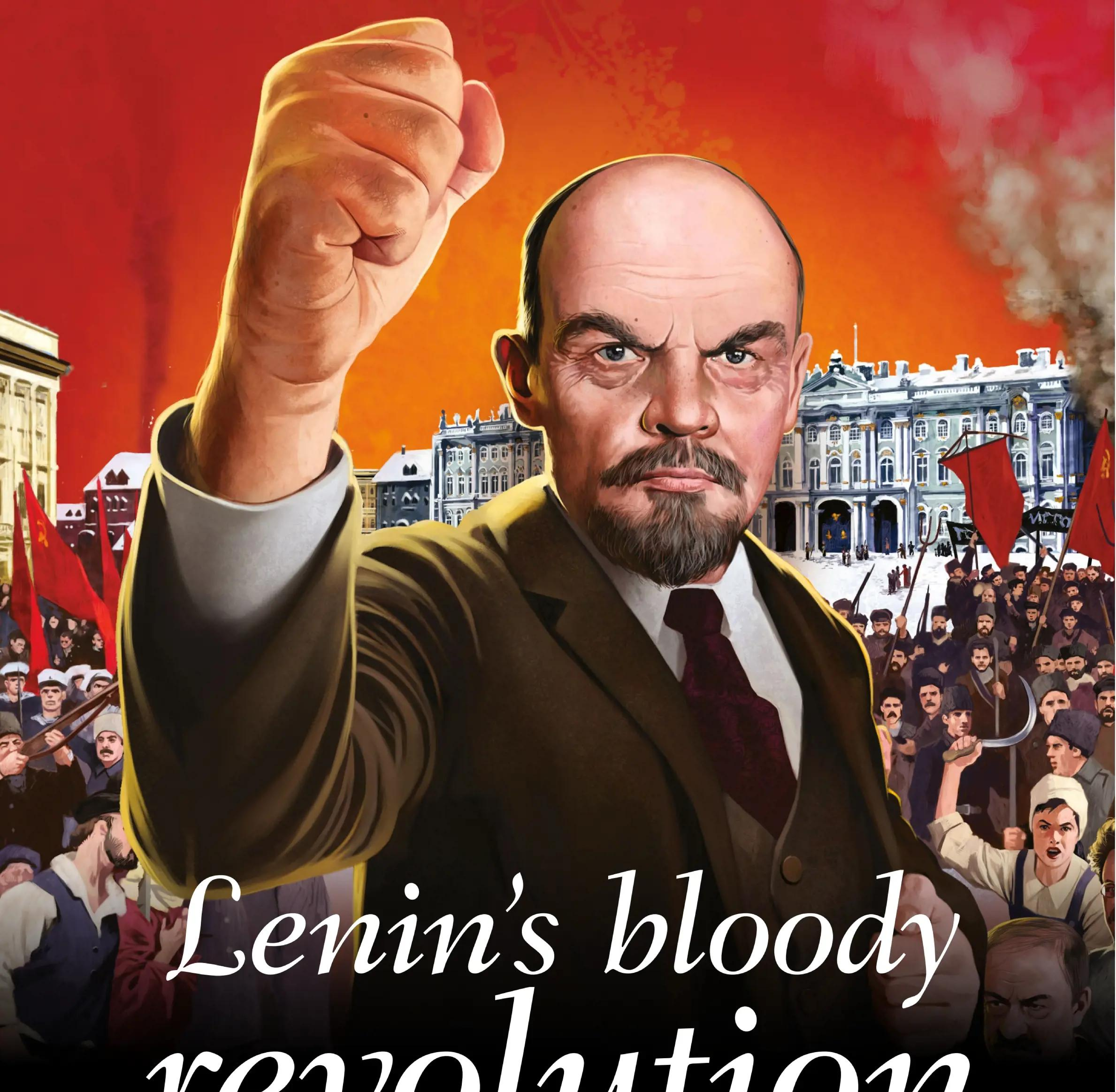
Death in the cellar

This stark, mutilated room witnessed one of the most infamous assassinations in history, for it was here that Nicholas II, the last tsar of Russia, was butchered alongside his wife and five children. Imprisoned in Ipatiev House in the city of Yekaterinburg by Bolshevik revolutionaries, the Romanovs hoped to ultimately be released, and on the night of 17 July 1918 their captors, led by Yakov Yurovsky, ordered the family to prepare to move to another secret location. They duly packed their belongings, but instead of being led out of the dishevelled building they were taken down into the cellar, where they were shot and bayoneted to death. For years rumours persisted that one of the children, 17-year-old Anastasia, had miraculously escaped the slaughter, inspiring several people to falsely claim to be her. In truth poor Anastasia died alongside her parents and siblings, the tragic victim of a regime bent on eradicating all traces of Russia's imperial past. The damage to the wall seen here was caused by investigators searching for bullets in 1919 as part of efforts by the anti-communist White Army to uncover what happened to the royal family.

Image source: Alamy



Lenin's bloody revolution

YEARS OF CIVIL UNREST CAME TO A HEAD IN OCTOBER 1917 AS LENIN RODE A REVOLUTIONARY WAVE INTO ST. PETERSBURG AND TURNED RUSSIA UPSIDE DOWN

Written by Greg King

The road to revolution

May 1896
Nicholas II is crowned tsar, making clear he'll continue the autocratic rule of Alexander III.

July 1903
The Russian Social Democrat Party splits into two factions: the Bolsheviks, under Lenin, and the Mensheviks.

January 1905
Tsarist troops open fire on demonstrators in St. Petersburg, causing widespread strikes. June sees a mutiny aboard the battleship Potemkin.

October 1905
Nicholas II ends the unrest by promising increased civil liberties for the proletariat. The Duma is formed.

July 1914
At the outbreak of war, Nicholas II assumes control of the Russian Army. His family come under the damaging influence of Rasputin.

February 1917
Protests turn to riots in St. Petersburg. The city falls to insurgents; the Duma collapses into chaos.

March–April 1917
Nicholas II abdicates and the Provisional Government forms. Lenin returns and sets up a base in St. Petersburg.

July 1917
Alexander Kerensky becomes prime minister of the government, but it remains largely powerless, lacking legitimacy.

October 1917
Bolsheviks take St. Petersburg and storm the Winter Palace. Lenin now controls Russia.

November 1917
In elections, the Bolsheviks lose. Clever politicking from Lenin sees his party hold onto and consolidate power regardless.

КРАСНАЯ ГВАРДІЯ
ЗАВОДА
ВУЛКАНЪ
II. ГР.

Members of the Red Guard in October 1917

Guns roared, thousands of voices yelled from the streets in defiance, and on 23 October 1917 (5 November N.S.), the massed supporters of Vladimir Lenin laid siege to St. Petersburg's Winter Palace, the site of an ineffectual government and the capstone event of a socialist revolution. For Lenin and his troops it was both a political and an ideological victory: the triumphant end to years of secretive theorising and plotting, many of them spent by Lenin in exile, before he returned to Russia to 'liberate' his people. If the celebrations were short-lived, the inversion of society to replace an autocracy with a socialist system was an extraordinary achievement.

Russia, even as late as the late 1800s, had seen a nobility of about a million presiding over a peasantry of 97 million; according to an 1897 census, there was practically no middle class. Industry was overwhelmingly agricultural, with the peasantry working on land that belonged to the rich minority.

An act of 1861 turned some of this land over to communal peasant ownership, but the government had provided compensation to the landowners, and the peasant communes were now responsible for the repayment of this debt to the government. These payments were abolished in 1905, but until then the peasants were as beholden to their communes as they had been to the landowners.

The population was also steadily increasing, which meant there wasn't enough land to go around, leading to unrest. The oil and railway industry booms of the Industrial Revolution happened slower and later in Russia than in other parts of Europe, but when they arrived they started to create a growing middle class more inclined towards Western-style capitalist business interests than had hitherto been the Russian norm. Workers migrated to industrial areas, but while some official monitoring nominally took place, the overcrowded slum conditions that workers had to endure were truly appalling.

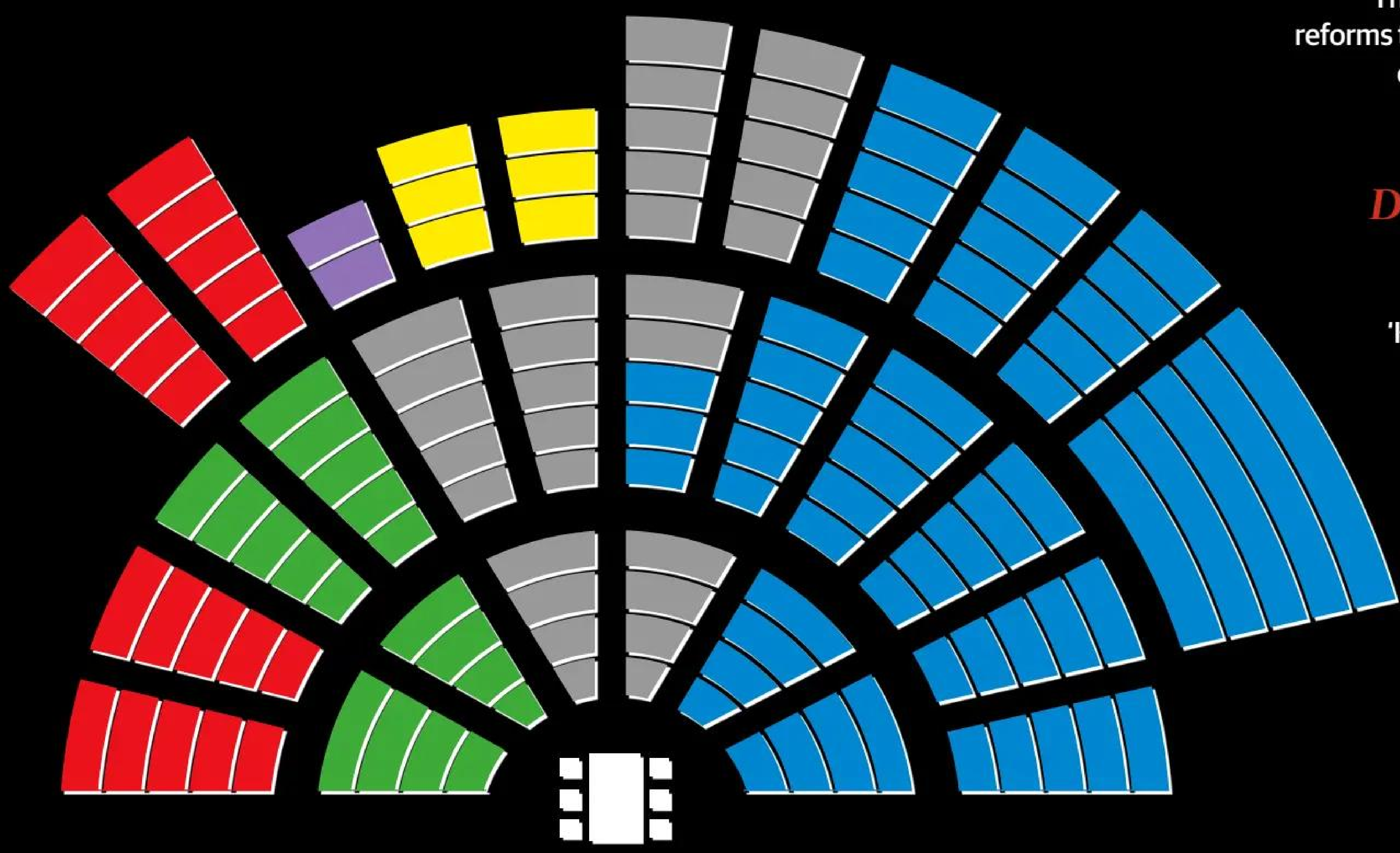
Russia at this time was presided over by the tsar, whose rule was propped up by the army, the police, the Russian Orthodox Church, the land-owning nobility, and the bureaucracy. Alexander II (1855–81) had brought in some reforms, such as elective assemblies to represent peasant agricultural and industrial workers in local government. Alexander III (1881–94), however, began to roll back these changes, and Nicholas II, the last tsar of Russia, disappointed many by sticking to that hard line. He considered any notion of societal reform "a senseless dream" and let it be known that he was resolutely committed to the principle of autocracy.

As early as the 1860s, various seeds of revolutionary thought were beginning to be sown. Populist movements began musing on a future that moved away from a monolithic state and more towards a country with a multiplicity of mutually supportive communes. These idealistic notions hit something of a bump

The State Duma

THE DUMA WAS INSTITUTED TO REPRESENT THE VOICES OF WORKING PEOPLE IN 1905. AS LENIN LAUNCHED HIS REVOLUTION, ITS SEATS WERE OCCUPIED AS FOLLOWS:

OTHERS (NON-RUSSIAN NATIONAL GROUPS, CENTRISTS, NATIONALISTS, RIGHTISTS) - 230



Trudoviks
10 seats

The Labour Group, or 'Trudoviks', were a breakaway from the Socialist Revolutionaries, since the SR had refused to participate in the Duma. They were a moderate socialist party (the name 'Trudovik' meaning 'labour') that grew out of small worker collectives.

Bolsheviks
15 seats

Lenin's faction of the Russian Social Democratic Party was committed to the overthrow of the tsarist autocracy and the redistribution of power to the proletariat. Unlike the Mensheviks, the Bolsheviks still believed that a small ruling elite was necessary.

Progressists
41 seats

The Progressive Party consisted of moderate liberals who believed that the time was right for the bourgeois, not the proletariat, to assume control of Russia. Two of the party's prominent members would go on to become a part of the Provisional Government.

Octobrists
95 seats

The Union of October 17 was a non-revolutionary conservative liberal party looking for compromise and co-operation between the government and public forces. They were working towards reforms to strengthen the existing order, not to overthrow it.

Constitutional Democratic Party
57 seats

Informally known as the 'Kadets', the Constitutional Democratic Party were liberals who had the support of professionals and academics. They were committed to workers' rights through policies like the introduction of the eight-hour working day.

when students from the universities started taking the message out into the countryside and found the peasant agricultural labourers actually hostile to their ideas, thinking the students' well-intentioned notions ridiculous, lofty, and ultimately unachievable. Populism was abandoned, and in its place the ideas of a German political analyst called Karl Marx began to find favour.

Marx was often frustrated at the way his followers simplified his complex writings and ran with them in directions he didn't approve of, but the key idea of his that people latched on to revolved around the control of the means of production. History, Marx believed, was a never-ending process of change in which particular social classes exploited the labour of everyone else and established dominance, only for their hegemony to become outmoded, after which they were naturally replaced by another up-and-coming class drawing power from unanticipated sources. They in turn would eventually be replaced for the same reasons.

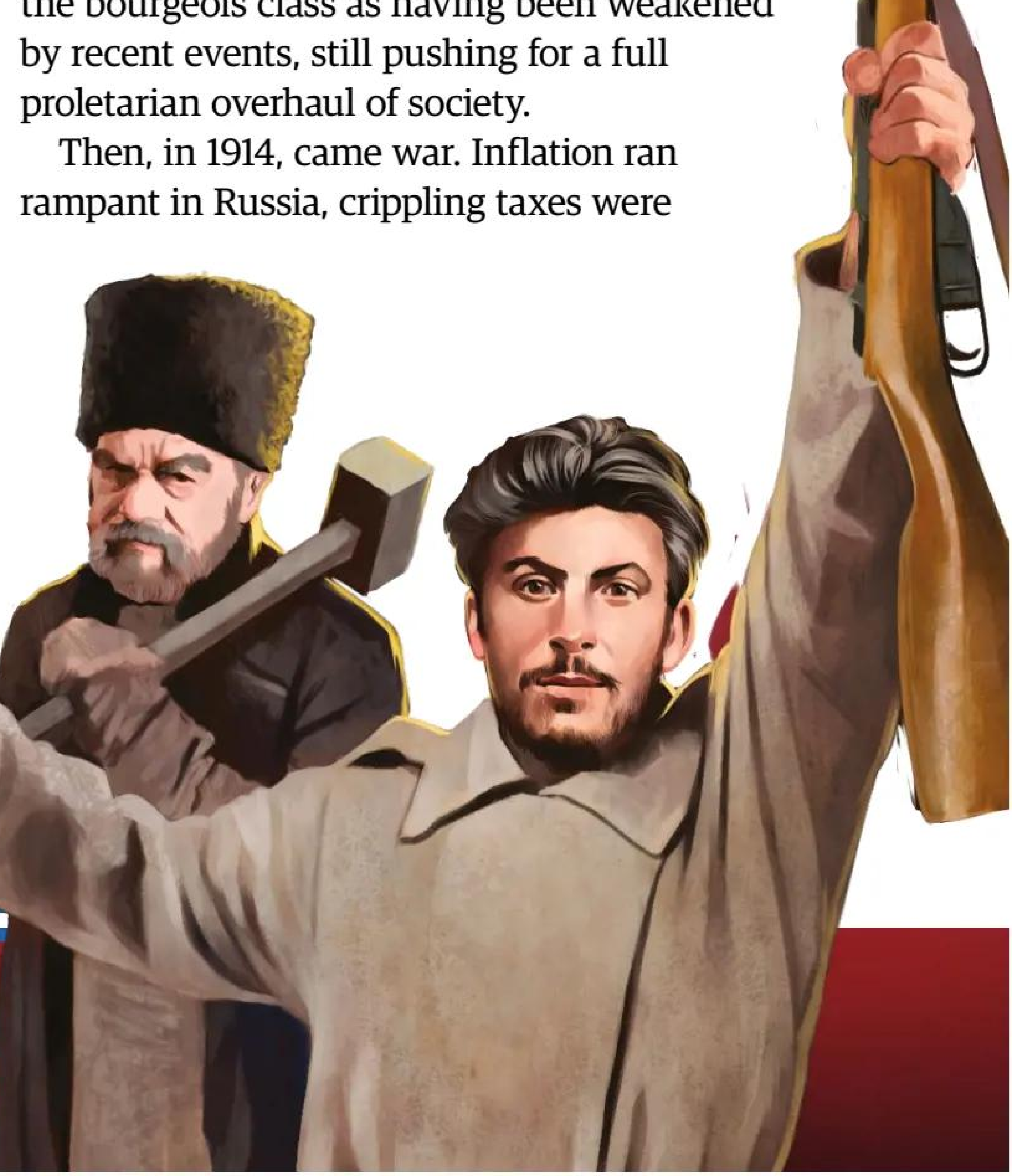
By this process, the bourgeois (the middle class) in Russia would, according to the theory, replace the aristocracy, and only once that had happened would the proletariat (the working class) supersede the bourgeois in their own revolution. Rather than leaving these predicted events to work themselves out in their own time, however, various groups intent on forcing the process started to come into existence.

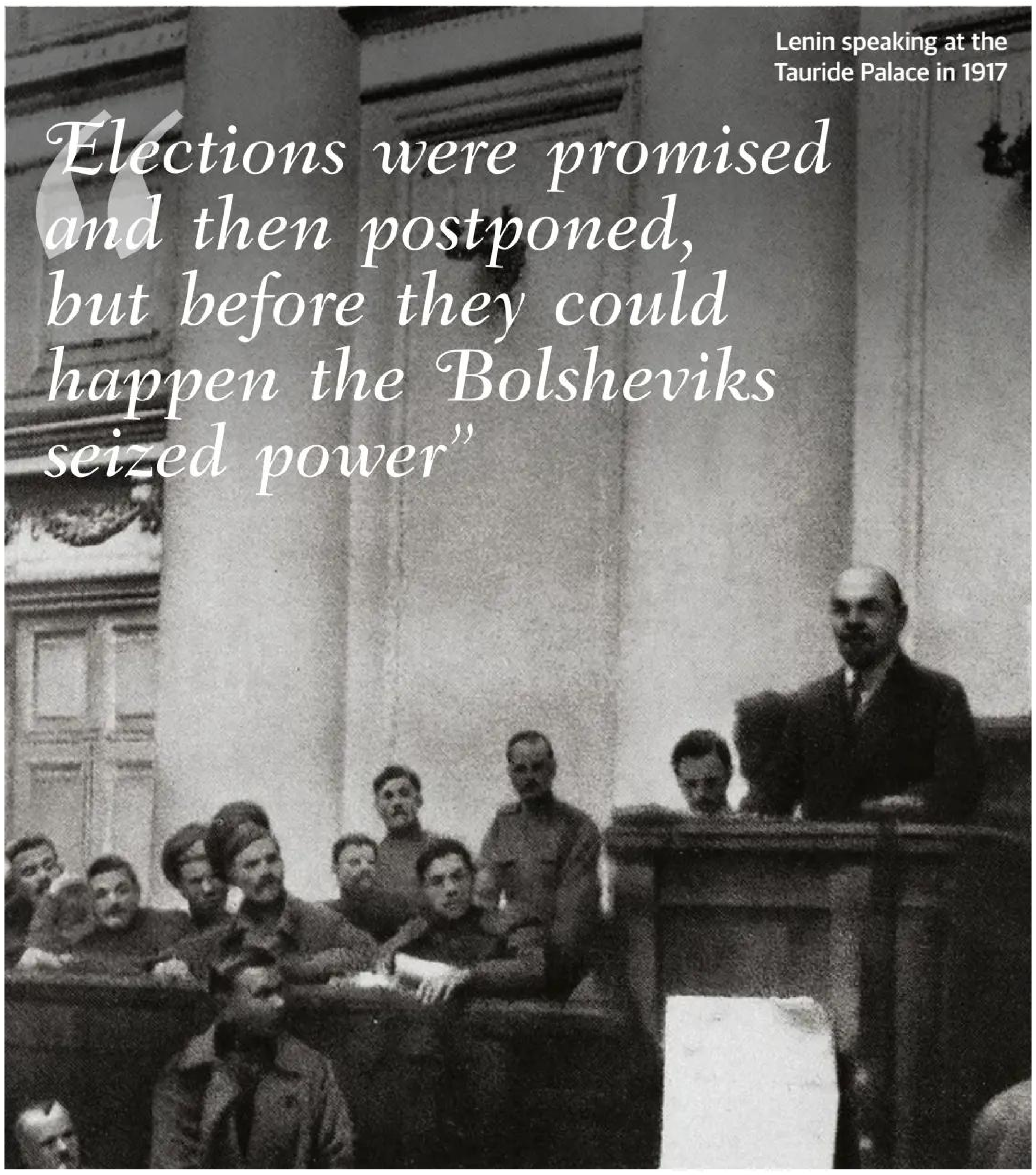
The social revolutionary movement grew out of populism, still intent on establishing a vast mass of worker cooperatives. But the Russian Social Democrats were the ones that really ran with Marx's theories. Finding that they couldn't quite agree even among themselves, the Social Democrats soon split into two factions: the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks. The key figure of the Mensheviks was Julius Tsederbaum, who would come to be known as Martov. Central to Bolshevism was Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, later better known as Lenin. Martov believed in a grass-roots democracy where everyone had an equal voice. Lenin insisted on the necessity of a small intellectual elite controlling the revolution.

As it turned out, revolution first broke out organically in 1905 without either of them being directly responsible. On 9 January, a union of factory workers demonstrated outside the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg and were fired on by the military, resulting in more than 100 deaths. A general strike followed; several officials were assassinated, including Tsar Nicholas II's uncle Grand Duke Sergei, the governor-general of Moscow; peasant revolts broke out in various provinces; and the crew of the battleship *Potemkin* mutinied. Tsar Nicholas was persuaded into the concession of forming a national parliament. This was divided into two houses, the Council of State (the upper house) and the Duma (the lower house), which would give the proletariat a represented, elected voice. But Nicholas stopped short of actually giving the Duma any power: its role, controversially, was to be purely consultative.

Some reforms were achieved. Health and education systems were put in place and laws were changed so that the peasantry could become landowners if they so chose – half of them did so by 1915. In-fighting between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks continued during this time, with the former positing the idea that they should swap their underground status for a more public relationship with the now-legal trade unions, and the latter, viewing the bourgeois class as having been weakened by recent events, still pushing for a full proletarian overhaul of society.

Then, in 1914, came war. Inflation ran rampant in Russia, crippling taxes were





Lenin speaking at the Tauride Palace in 1917

> *"Elections were promised and then postponed, but before they could happen the Bolsheviks seized power"*

The Provisional Government in Petrograd, 1917

Key figures

BOLSHEVIKS

Vladimir Lenin

Leader of the Bolsheviks

The revolutionary thinker and politician steered Russia into a communist revolution and was its premier from 1917 until his death from a stroke in 1924, aged 53. His body lay in state for four days and was viewed by almost a million mourners.

Leon Trotsky

Chairman of the Revolutionary Committee

Initially a Menshevik, Trotsky joined the Bolsheviks for the 1917 revolution and was instrumental in its success. He was later expelled from the Communist Party and exiled for his opposition to Stalin. He was assassinated in 1940.

Joseph Stalin

Member of the Central Committee

A minor player in the 1917 revolution, Stalin rose through Bolshevik ranks until he took the leadership following Lenin's death. His rule turned Russia into an industrial power, but he was also responsible for the deaths of millions in the Gulags.

PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT

Prince Georgy Lvov

Minister President/Minister of the Interior

The first post-imperial prime minister of Russia, Lvov was the first head of the Provisional Government following Nicholas II's abdication. A veteran of the Duma, he failed to garner much support and resigned after just four months in position.

Alexander Kerensky

Minister of Justice/Minister of War and Navy/Minister President

The Trudovik Kerensky took over the Provisional Government in July 1917. Unpopular with the military, he was deposed by the revolution. He fled and remained in exile until his death in 1970.

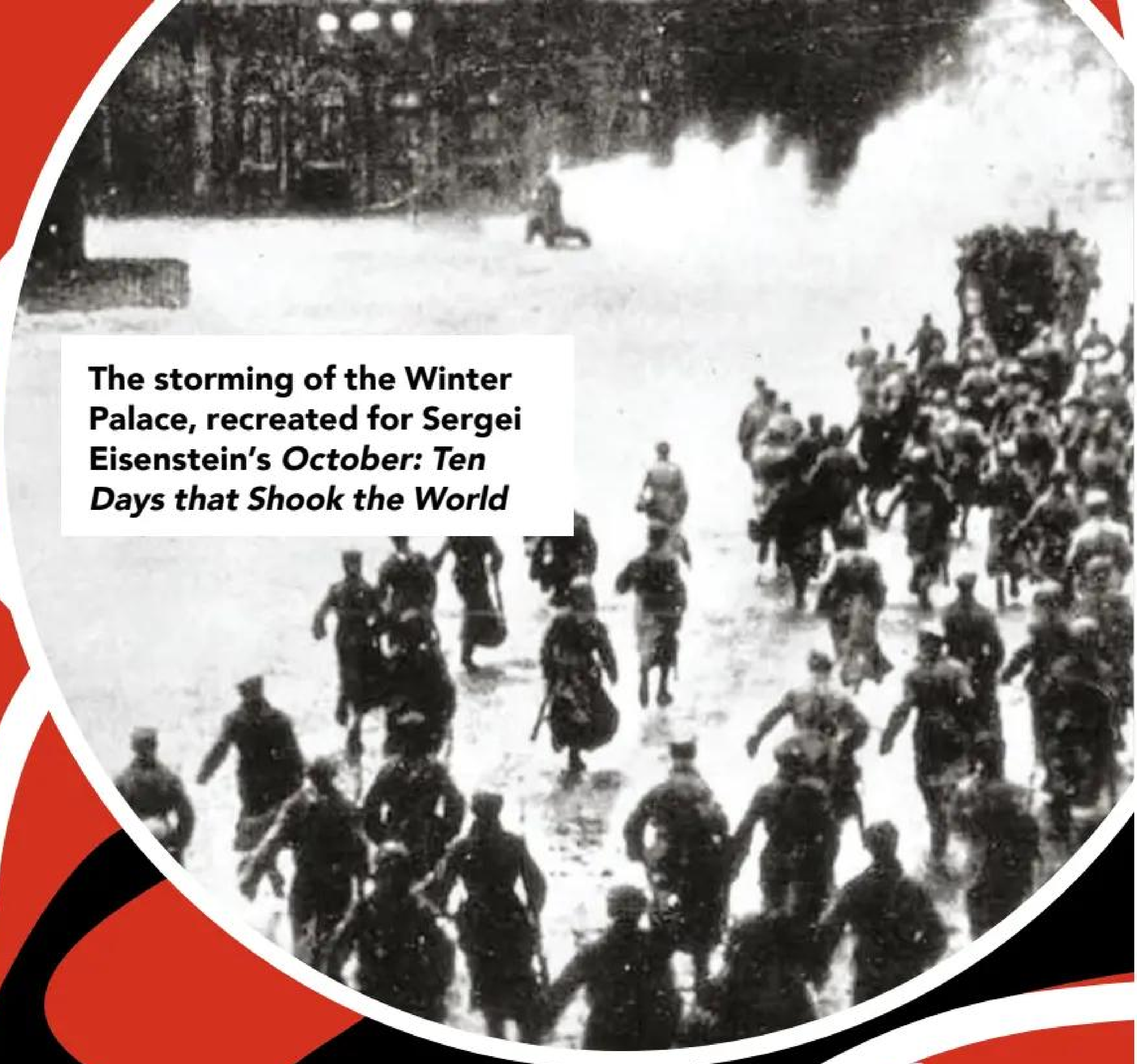
Viktor Chernov

Minister of Agriculture

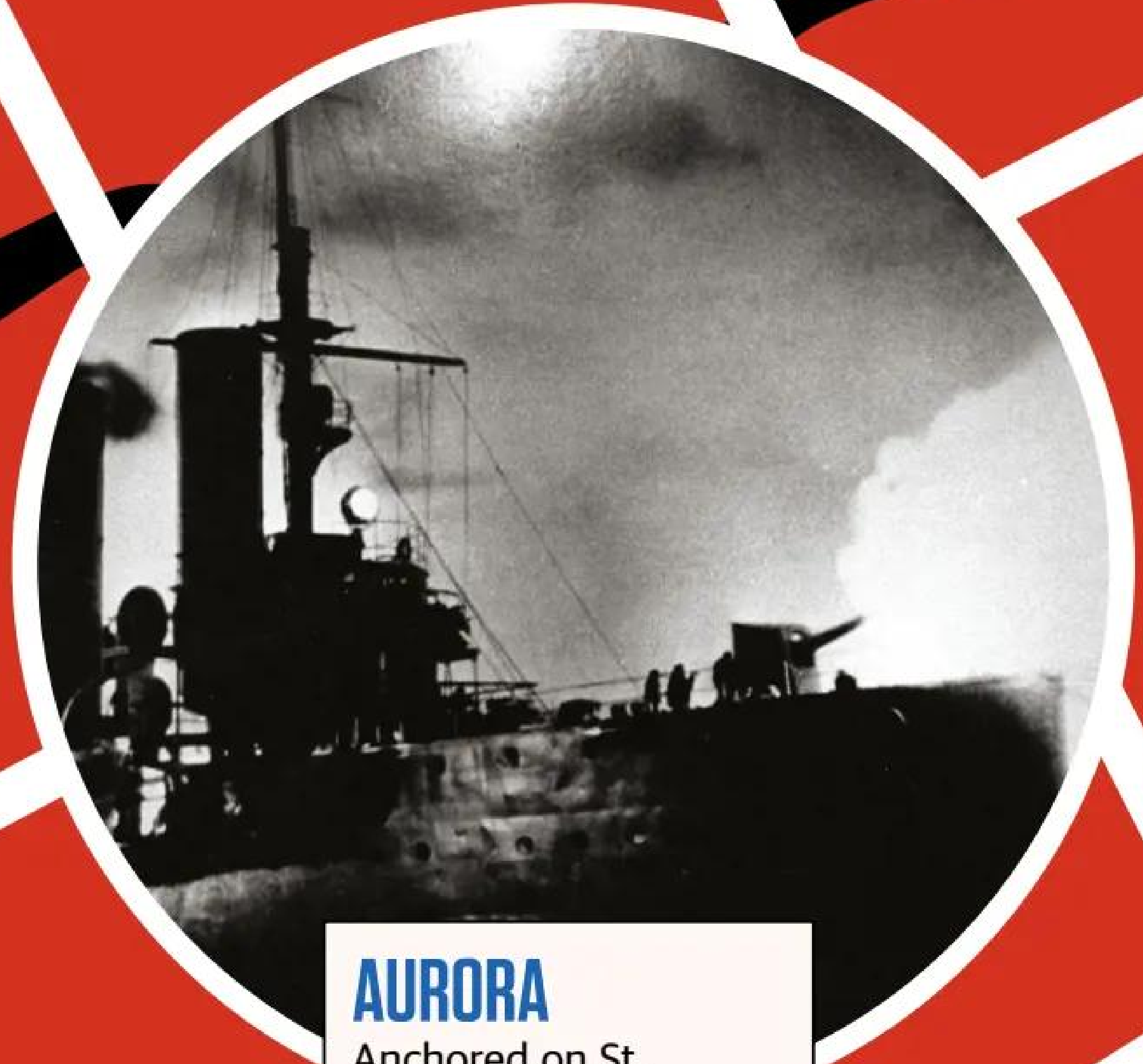
One of the founding members of the Russian Socialist-Revolutionaries, Chernov was a formidable political analyst – some called him the 'brain' of the party. Following the Bolsheviks' seizure of power he, like Kerensky, fled to Europe.

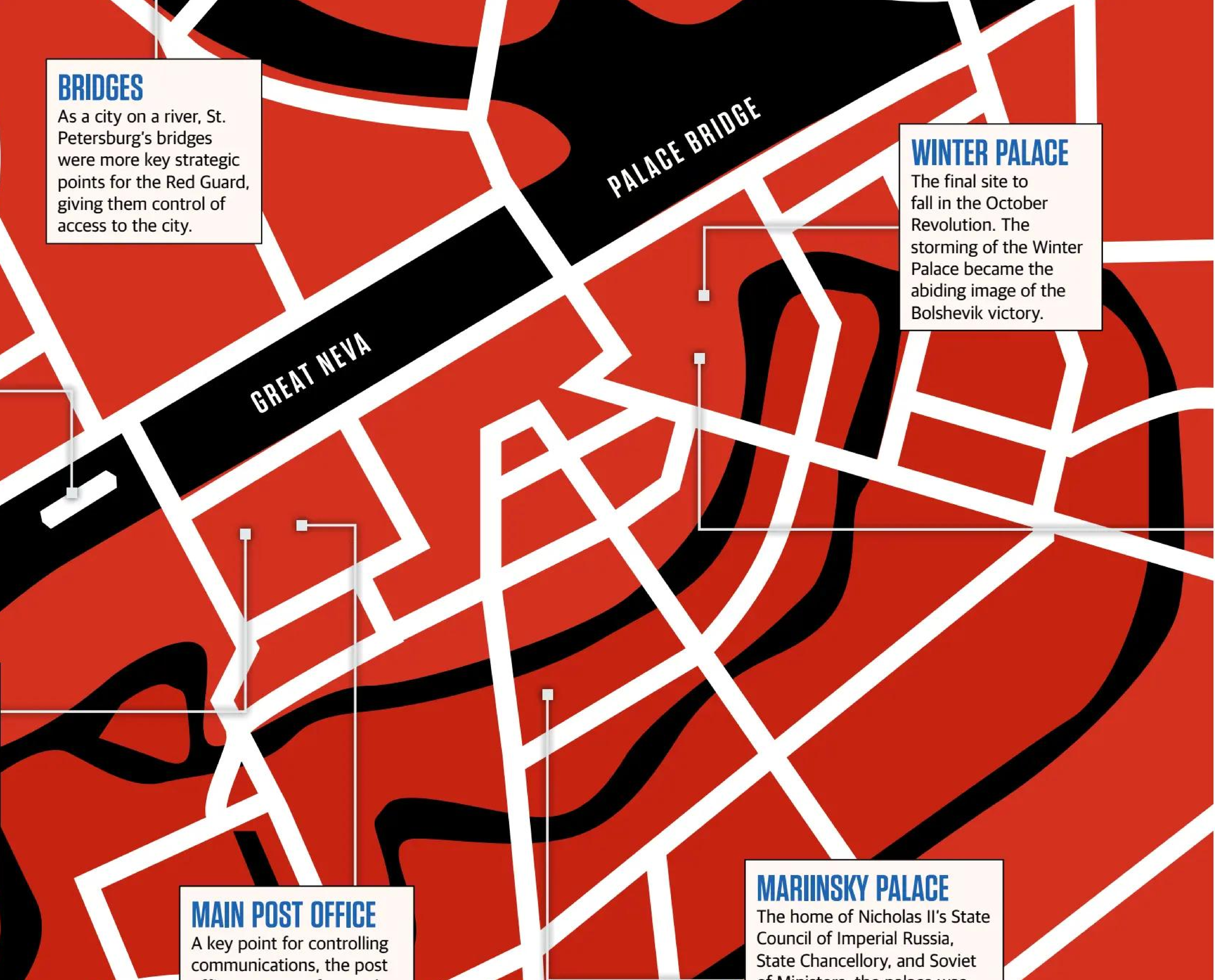
The October Uprising

IN OCTOBER 1917, LENIN'S RED GUARD STORMED THE STREETS OF PETROGRAD, TAKING OVER SEVERAL STRATEGIC POINTS



The storming of the Winter Palace, recreated for Sergei Eisenstein's *October: Ten Days that Shook the World*





BRIDGES

As a city on a river, St. Petersburg's bridges were more key strategic points for the Red Guard, giving them control of access to the city.

AURORA

Anchored on St. Petersburg's Bolshaya Neva River, the cruiser *Aurora* was the ship from which the revolutionary troops fired blank shots at the Winter Palace, terrorising the people barricaded inside.

WINTER PALACE

The final site to fall in the October Revolution. The storming of the Winter Palace became the abiding image of the Bolshevik victory.

CENTRAL TELEGRAPH

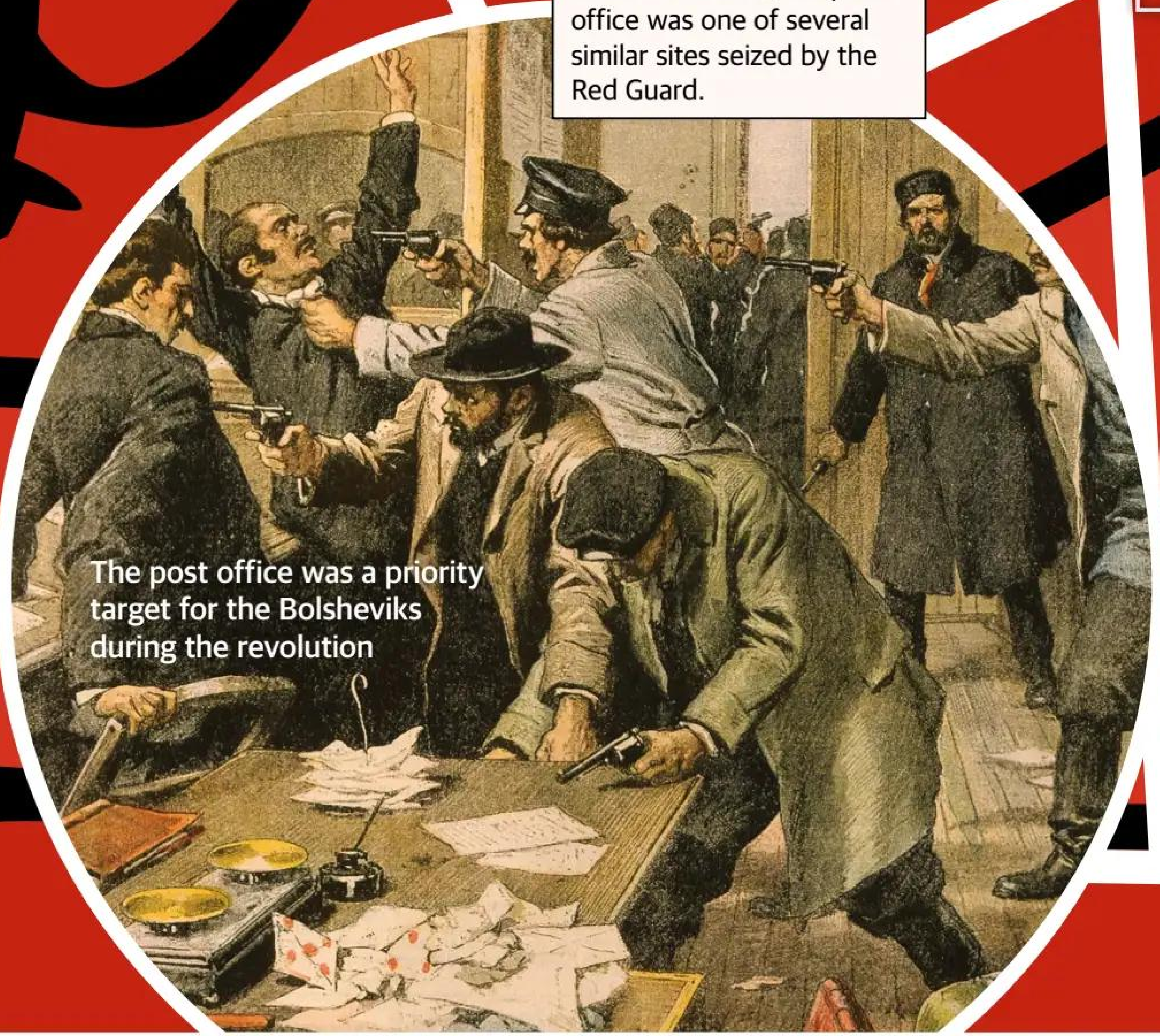
Like the post office, control of the Central Telegraph was of significant use to the Bolsheviks and the Red Guard, cutting off the opposition from any means of summoning help or reinforcement.

MAIN POST OFFICE

A key point for controlling communications, the post office was one of several similar sites seized by the Red Guard.

MARIINSKY PALACE

The home of Nicholas II's State Council of Imperial Russia, State Chancellory, and Soviet of Ministers, the palace was given over to the Provisional Government in March 1917 and then to various Soviet ministries after October.



The post office was a priority target for the Bolsheviks during the revolution

VYBORG DISTRICT
NEVA

TAURIDE PALACE
The home of the Petrograd Soviet (the City Council of St. Petersburg, which was called Petrograd until 1924). The Soviet was established after the February Revolution as a rival power to the Provisional Government. Several of its members – including Trotsky – were instrumental during the October Revolution.

HOTEL ASTORIA
Hand-to-hand fighting between the Tsarists and the Bolsheviks outside the Hotel Astoria was so intense that the pavements bore bloodstains the next day. Several of the revolutionary leadership took up residence there, and Lenin gave a famous address from its balcony in 1919.

SMOLNY
As Lenin's base in St. Petersburg during October 1917, this is where the leader and his government worked. Lenin also lived here with his wife until the seat of power was moved to the capital city, Moscow, in 1918.

RAILWAY LINES/STATIONS
Yet another strategic target for the Red Guard, seizing the rail lines placed transport and stations under revolutionary control. Part of the St. Petersburg to Hiitola line was blown up a year later in 1918 by Finnish troops to prevent supplies reaching their Soviet enemies.

Lenin masterminded the October Revolution from the Smolny Institute

imposed, and the peasantry were reduced to barely surviving at a level of subsistence farming. The Mensheviks largely supported Russia defending itself against Germany. The more radical Bolsheviks, fronted by the vocal Lenin, advocated flipping the situation into a civil war of the Russian proletariat against its own government, which, if successful, would evolve into a revolutionary war across Europe. Again, the revolution of 1917 would initially see the various political factions scrambling to take ownership rather than leading from the front. General unrest suddenly led to major upheaval. On 23 February/8 March, thousands of female factory workers took to the streets of St. Petersburg, nominally to mark Women's Day, until the tone shifted into chants demanding bread and mass singing of the French revolutionary anthem 'La Marseillaise'. Three days later, rioting in Znamensky Square was met with gunfire from the Znamensky regiment, which caused several other regiments to find their soldiers mutinying in protest. The next day, St. Petersburg fell to the insurgents, with the authorities retreating to the Winter Palace and the Duma in chaos.

Tsar Nicholas, long the lightening rod for the people's dissatisfaction – it didn't help that his household had come under the malign influence of notorious monk Rasputin while Nicholas had been commanding Russian forces in World War I – abdicated, ending the Romanov dynasty's 304-year rule with extraordinary suddenness. Russia unanimously rejoiced, and in the civil conflicts that followed no party or faction even suggested the monarchy's revival. "The country had so radically vomited up the monarchy that it could not ever crawl down the people's throat again," wrote Leon Trotsky.

The celebrations were short-lived. A Provisional Government was formed, but while the very word 'provisional' was intended to make clear its temporary nature, it struggled to keep order, not least because, having not been elected, the people were resistant to the idea that it wielded any authority. It also continued to keep Russia fighting in World War I, which obviously remained an unpopular policy at home. Elections were promised for September and then postponed until November, but before they could happen the Bolsheviks seized power.

Despite his devotion to his homeland and his passion for its political struggles, Lenin had actually spent the bulk of the previous two

Soviet decrees

IN THE SEVEN YEARS FOLLOWING THE REVOLUTION IN 1917, THE NEW GOVERNMENT ISSUED DOZENS OF LEGISLATIVE ACTS. THEY WERE KNOWN AS DECREES

Decree on Peace

The document proposing the immediate withdrawal of Russia from the disaster of World War I, a key Bolshevik policy since before the revolution.

Decree on Land

Again a central Bolshevik policy made law: all private property was to be abolished and landed estates redistributed among the peasantry.

Decree Socialist Homeland Is In Danger!

A call for peasant forces to mobilise in Russia's defence in the face of German advances. "Protect each position to the last drop of blood!" was the cry.

Decree on the Red Terror

An appeal for workers to crush any signs of counter-revolution against the Bolsheviks. "Anyone who dares to spread the slightest rumour against the Soviet regime will be arrested immediately…"

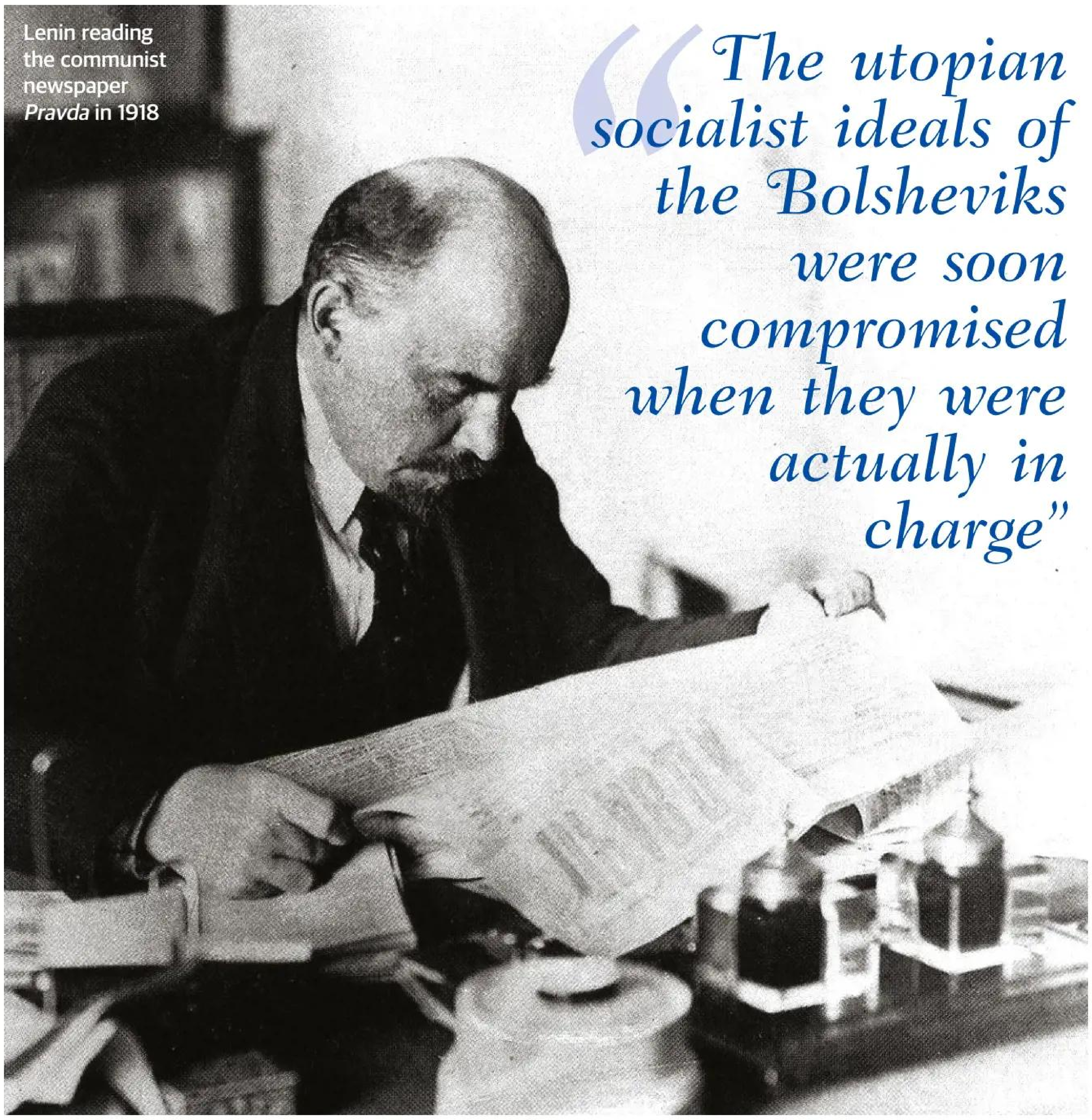
Decree on the Introduction of Time Measurement According to International Time Zone System

Russia changed from the 'Old Style' Julian Calendar to the 'New Style' Gregorian system used by much of the rest of the world in 1918. There's a few days' difference, meaning the October Revolution actually took place in November.

decades away from Russia. Exiled to Siberia for three years in 1897, afterwards he spent itinerant periods in Munich, London, Paris, Sweden, Switzerland, and Finland, among other places, all the time keeping a close eye on events at home and maintaining correspondence with his revolutionary comrades all over Europe. The unrest in February 1917 made him desperate to return to Russia from his base in Switzerland, but the fact that World War I was raging around him made that journey problematic. Various adventurous routes were discussed, but the eventual solution was an ad-hoc exchange of Russian exiles for Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war. The Russian Provisional Government dragged their heels over the deal, presumably not sure they wanted Lenin back at all, so the impatient communists did the deal with Germany themselves. Lenin arrived to a triumphant reception at the Finland Station in St. Petersburg in April 1917.

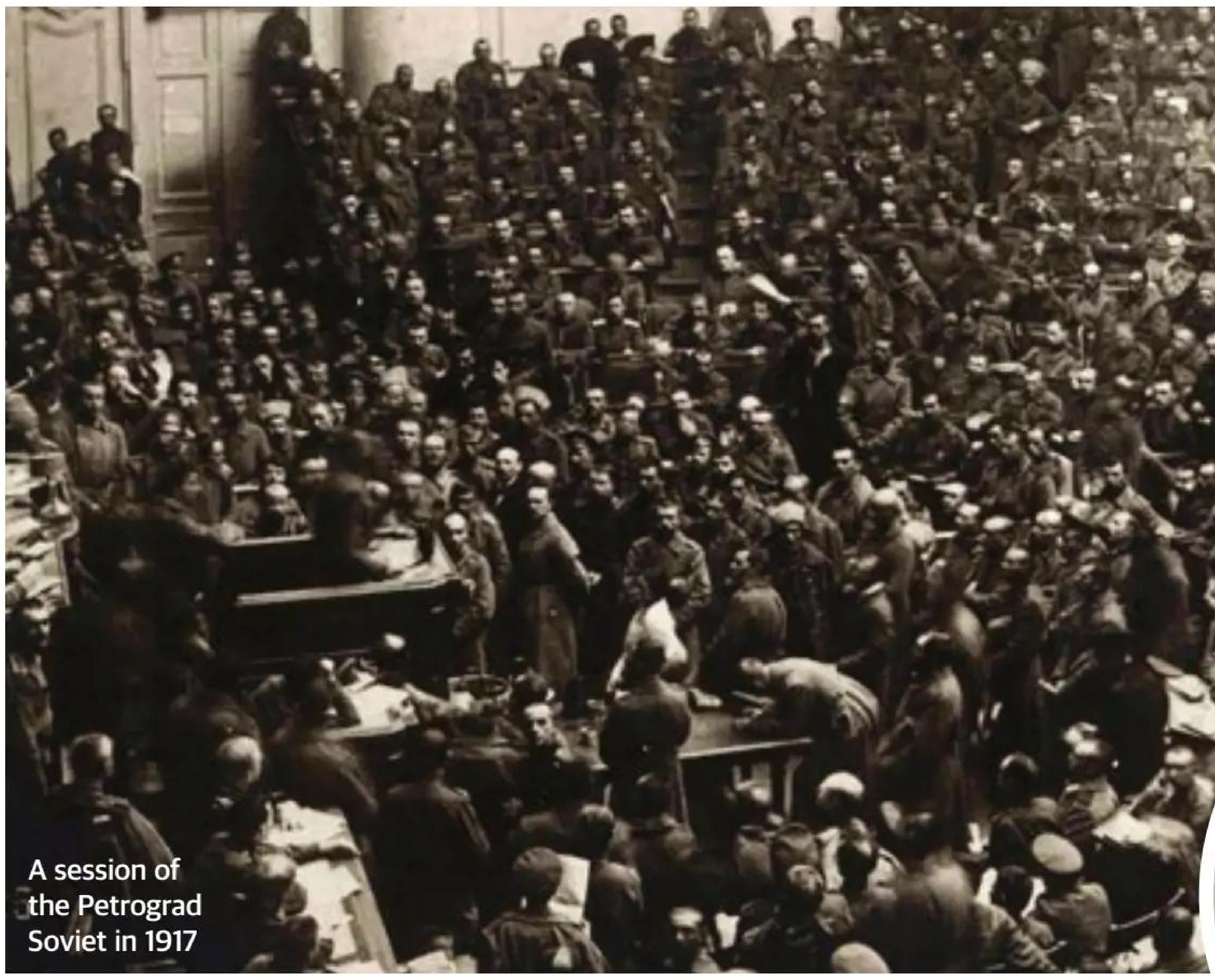
For Lenin, the timing was urgent. Over the next six months he deluged his Bolshevik Central Committee colleagues with arguments in favour of radical immediate action, and in October the decision to seize power was made, with an alliance of Lenin and former Menshevik Trotsky, now the chairman of the predominantly Bolshevik Petrograd Soviet (meaning 'council'), at its vanguard. The Bolshevik takeover had begun.

When the Provisional Government, led by the moderate socialist Alexander Kerensky, ordered the shutting down of the Bolshevik printing presses as a prelude to an attack on the Petrograd Military Revolutionary Committee,

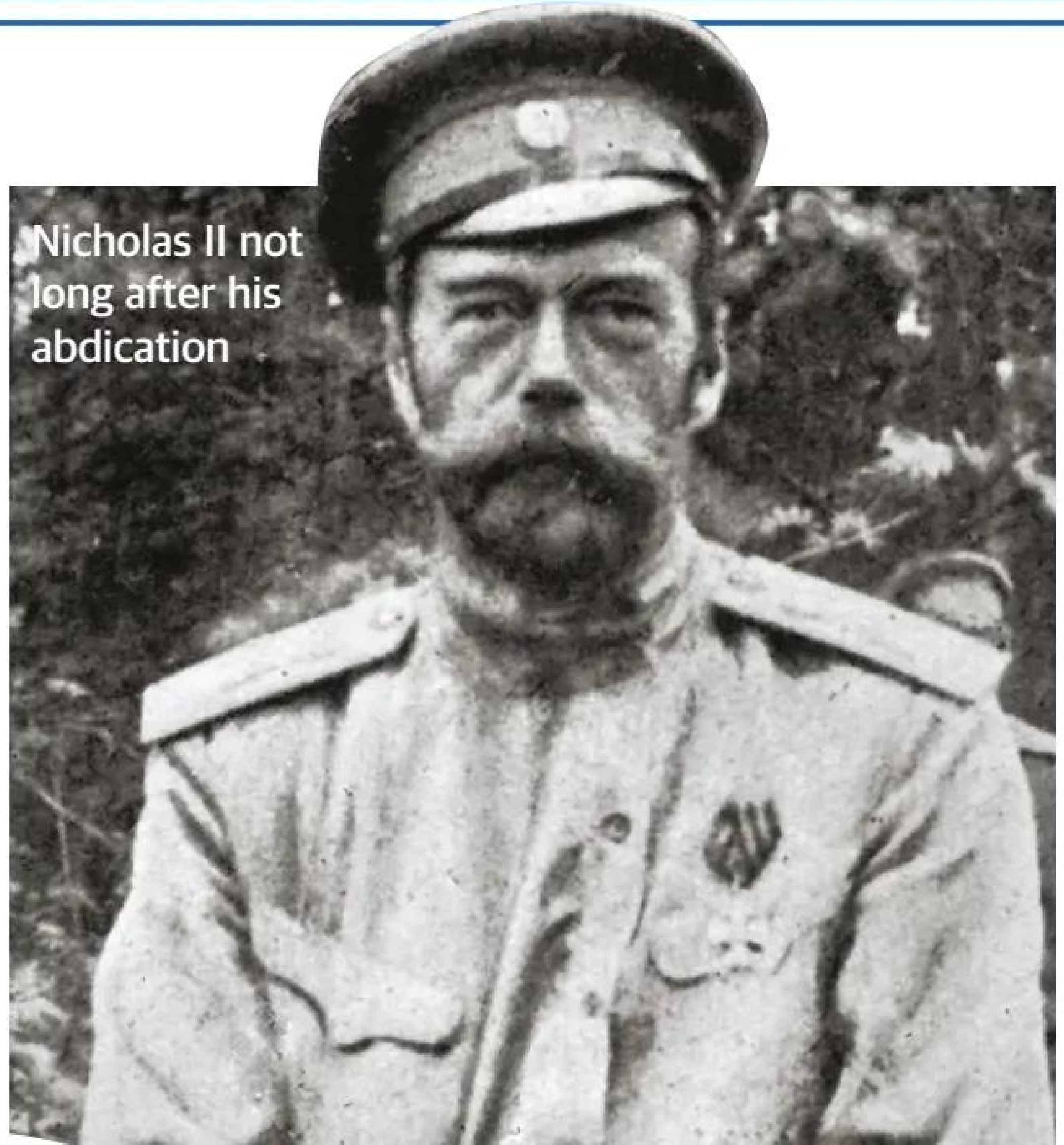


Lenin reading the communist newspaper *Pravda* in 1918

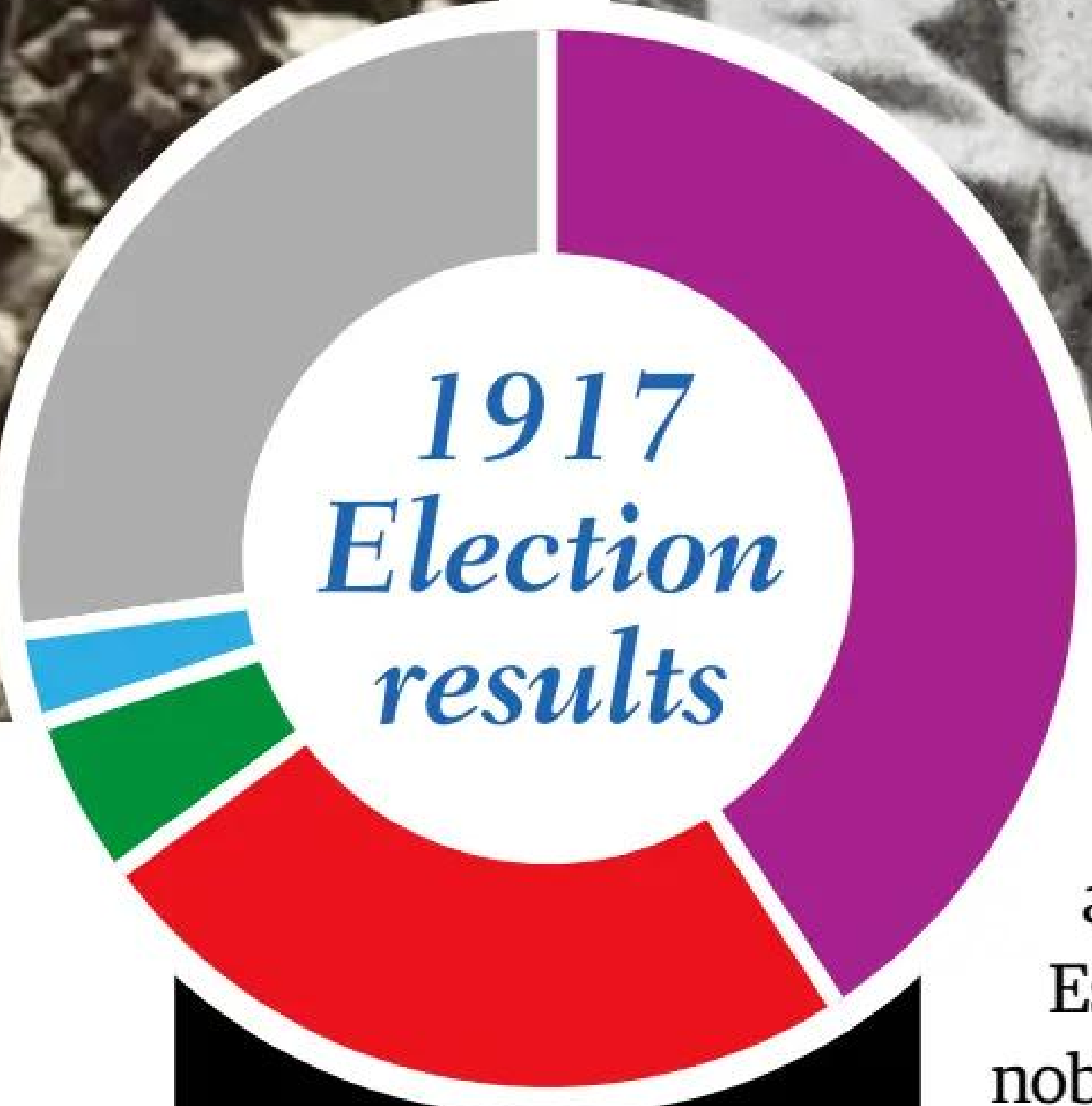
> "The utopian socialist ideals of the Bolsheviks were soon compromised when they were actually in charge"



A session of the Petrograd Soviet in 1917



Nicholas II not long after his abdication



1917 Election results

Socialist-Revolutionary Party
Percentage: 41
Number of seats: 380

Bolsheviks
Percentage: 24
Number of seats: 168

Constitutional Democratic Party
Percentage: 5
Number of seats: 17

Mensheviks
Percentage: 3
Seats: 18

Others
Percentage: 27
Number of seats: 120

the Bolsheviks' armed bands of proletariat workers, known as the Red Guard, retaliated by storming strategic points such as bridges, railway stations, telephone exchanges, post offices, the national bank, and the Tauride Palace. Kerensky fled, having been unable to muster enough troops to counter the Bolsheviks. By the morning, the only site that hadn't fallen was the Winter Palace, the headquarters of the Provisional Government.

The 'Storming of the Winter Palace' has gone down as a famously dramatic moment in history, but it was actually a much more scrappy affair than portrayals like Sergei Eisenstein's classic film *October: Ten Days that Shook the World* have suggested. The revolutionary military had planned to begin the assault using heavy artillery from the nearby Peter and Paul Fortress, but the weapons there were rusty from disuse and wouldn't function. Soldiers brought up replacement cannon from elsewhere in the fortress but then realised they didn't have the right shells to fire. The signal to attack, it had been agreed, would come from a red lantern raised on a flagpole, but during the event a red lantern couldn't be found, and the soldier sent to look for one got lost in the dark and fell into a bog. The lamp he eventually brought back couldn't be attached to the pole and wasn't red. Nobody that eventually participated in the attack even saw it. The chaos dragged the Winter Palace's downfall out to a tortuous 15 hours, when a more organised force could probably have achieved it in far less time.

Luckily for the Bolshevik forces, the defence from within the Winter Palace was practically non-existent. The ministers inside were inexperienced in military matters, and the small number of troops defending them were becoming increasingly nervous the longer they waited for the Bolsheviks to breach the doors. Ammunition and food supplies for even a single evening were desperately low, and when the Bolsheviks began firing blank shots at the palace from the cruiser *Aurora* anchored on the Bolshaya Neva River, the soldiers mostly panicked and fled. Lenin appeared in public for the first time in months to proclaim that the Provisional Government had been overthrown and that the time had finally come to "set about building a proletarian socialist state". The Bolshevik position was strengthened even further when the Mensheviks and the Social-Revolutionaries walked out of the resultant talks, leaving Lenin and his comrades basically unopposed. "You are miserable bankrupts. You have played out your role," Trotsky said to those departing. "Go where you belong, into the dustbin of history."

Such had been the state of the Provisional Government that, as one commentator put it, the Bolsheviks did not so much seize power as pick it up from where it had been dropped. The revolution has been called a coup in some circles, but the word 'coup' implies taking power from a strong opponent, where the power that the Provisional Government actually wielded was debatable. Essentially, there had been nobody actually 'running' Russia since the abdication of the tsar.

Sadly, however, the utopian socialist ideals of the Bolsheviks were soon compromised when they were actually in charge, with Lenin forced into compromises such as the crippling Brest-Litovsk peace treaty signed with Germany, which cost Russia several of its provinces and deprived it of vast swathes of its agricultural and industrial resources.

The Bolshevik ideology proved largely unworkable simply due to the practicalities of governance. Lenin ended up replacing one monolithic state with another, overruling the 'free' elections of November 1917 (in which the Socialist Revolutionary Party won a significant majority of the votes) and announcing "the Dictatorship of the Proletariat" so that the Bolsheviks walked away with power anyway. Factional splits and civil war followed, as did the continuing oppression of the proletariat that Bolshevism had sought to liberate, the catastrophic famine of the 1930s, and the horrific regime of the former Bolshevik Joseph Stalin.

The ideas that had led to the revolution had been – and for many are still – inspirational. The tragedy remains that the revolutionaries failed to live up to their own ideology. Millions of people would ultimately die as a result.

Images: Joe Cummings; Alamy; Rex Features; Getty

The man of steel

THE FIREBRAND FORGED FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS TO CLAIM LENIN'S SOVIET UNION, STALIN DREW A REVOLUTIONARY IRON CURTAIN ACROSS EUROPE

On 6 December 1878 (18 December N.S.), the man who would be known to history as Joseph Stalin was born Ioseb Dzhugashvili. The name is Georgian, for this most implacable of Russian rulers was not himself Russian. His father was a cobbler and his mother a washerwoman. Stalin's father was a drunk who beat his son. The family spoke only Georgian and Stalin himself only learned to speak Russian at school; he never lost his thick accent. The young Stalin was bullied, while the smallpox he contracted at the age of seven permanently scarred his face, and an accident at 12 left his left arm shorter than his right arm. But the boy was immensely strong and tough, and he learned to hide his feelings while storing revenge in his heart. The culture into which he was born had a strong tradition of blood feuds, and the young Stalin took its lessons to heart: never forget and never forgive, but wait, sometimes for years, to take revenge.

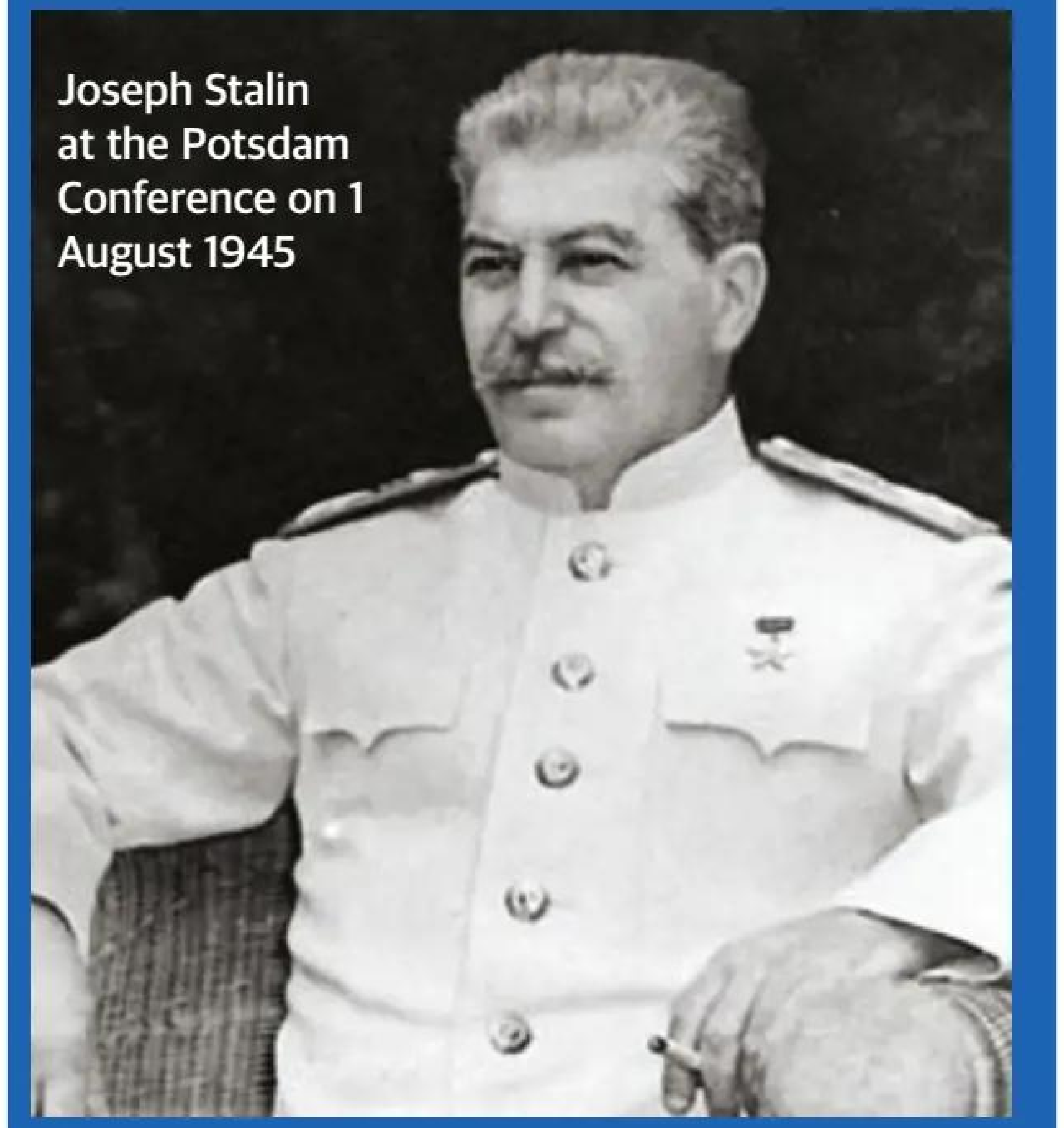
Stalin's devout mother wanted him to be a priest, and in 1895, aged 16, sent him to the Russian Orthodox Seminary at Tiflis, capital of Georgia. It didn't work: the young Stalin became an atheist, saying, "You know, they are fooling us, there is no God." But in losing one religion, Stalin gained another: communism. At the seminary, he read the works of Lenin and Marx and joined one of the proto-Bolshevik groups. The seminary finally expelled Stalin in 1899, and his involvement in revolutionary politics deepened, leading him to become, in 1902, a full-time revolutionary, living off crime and hand-outs. As an agitator and revolutionary, the young Stalin came often to the attention of the tsar's secret police: he was arrested seven times between 1902 and 1913, being sent into internal exile within the vast boundaries of the Russian Empire. Stalin always seemed able to escape, however, leading to rumours that he was working as a double agent for the tsarist secret police.

In 1906, Stalin married for the first time. His wife, Ketevan Svanidze, gave birth to a son, Yakov, but died from typhus in 1907. Stalin was grief-stricken. At her funeral he said, "This creature softened my heart of stone. She died and with her died my last warm feelings for humanity." And when it came time for Svanidze to be buried, Stalin threw himself into the grave; only the approach of the secret police brought him to himself, and he fled.

It was after his wife's death that Ioseb Dzhugashvili took the name Stalin. In Russian, it means 'man of steel'.

Stalin's rise up the Communist Party hierarchy was slow but steady. In between periods of exile, he edited the party newspaper *Pravda*, and in 1917 he was elected to the party's Central Committee. With the

Reign of terror



Joseph Stalin at the Potsdam Conference on 1 August 1945

THE GULAGS

The Gulags were the labour camps where Stalin incarcerated political opponents and petty criminals. Estimates vary, but about 14 million were imprisoned in the camps and an additional 10 million sent into labour colonies and exile. The work was so brutal and the conditions so tough that about ten per cent of inmates died each year.

THE NKVD

The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, or NKVD, was formed in 1934 and merged into successor secret police organisations in 1946. But during those 12 years it was the chief instrument of Stalin's repression, running the Gulags, conducting show trials, and executing anyone whom Stalin saw as a threat. Their favoured method of execution was shooting a kneeling prisoner in the back of the head.

SHOW TRIALS

A key feature of the Great Terror were the show trials held in Moscow between 1936 and 1938. In these trials, the most high-profile of the men Stalin wished to destroy – all the Bolsheviks who had fought alongside him in the 1917 Revolution – were put on public trial accused of increasingly outlandish crimes, including plots to assassinate Stalin. The trials were characterised by public confessions, protestations of recovered loyalty to Stalin, and the execution of the defendants. Many Western observers believed the trials to be fair, unaware of how the NKVD had broken defendants with interrogation and torture before the trials.

How Stalin did business

As Stalin aged, he conducted more business from his country house outside Moscow or over dinner at the Kremlin. He preferred to sleep through the day and work at night, so his inner circle was often summoned to begin their day in the evening – often with a cowboy film in the Kremlin movie theatre. As the movies were in English, a politburo member translated the film into Russian as they watched. The film over, Stalin would have dinner with his officials after midnight, and then demand they stay with him through the night.

While Stalin drank in moderation, he would insist his party comrades knocked back the vodka – drunkenness revealed weaknesses that he could later exploit. As part of his rituals of control, Stalin would humiliate his officials in front of the gathering, on one occasion forcing 60-year-old Nikita Khrushchev to dance a Ukrainian folk dance. Khrushchev would later succeed Stalin as ruler, but, as he said, "When Stalin says dance, a wise man dances."

Another reason for Khrushchev's survival was that he took daytime naps so he stayed awake during the late-night sessions. As he noted later, "Things went badly for those who dozed off at Stalin's table."

abdication of the tsar on 2/15 March 1917, the future of Russia was up for grabs and Lenin was determined to grasp it. Launching the second phase of the Russian Revolution, Lenin made his bid for power.

In the battle of colours, the Reds defeated the Whites (communists against anti-communists) and Lenin assumed control. In the confused fighting and in-fighting of the next five years, Stalin did little to distinguish himself beyond displaying a particular ruthlessness towards deserters and enemies, but nevertheless Lenin appointed him general secretary of the Communist Party in 1922. This enabled Stalin to place allies into many important positions in the party.

Lenin was forced into semi-retirement by a series of strokes he suffered in 1922. Although he turned against Stalin in the final two years of his life, Stalin was able to suppress Lenin's criticism of him so that when Lenin died on 21 January 1924, he was able to win the subsequent power struggle, gradually concentrating power in his own hands.

Initially, Stalin saw the main threat to his power as coming from the Old Bolsheviks: the committed communist revolutionaries who had helped Lenin push through the Russian Revolution. Stalin moved to isolate them: Trotsky was exiled, while others were stripped of power. But even with them removed from power, Stalin's paranoia still saw the Old Bolsheviks as possible centres of opposition, and between 1934 and 1939 he moved to liquidate every possible opponent to his rule in a period that came to be called the Great Terror. The Old Bolsheviks were, one by one, arrested, tortured, and then put on show trials where they confessed to a series of bizarre crimes against the Soviet Union while professing their undying love for Stalin. Their encomiums to Stalin were given in return for promises that their families would go unharmed after their executions, but frequently no sooner had the Old Bolsheviks been executed than Stalin broke his promise and executed their relatives too.

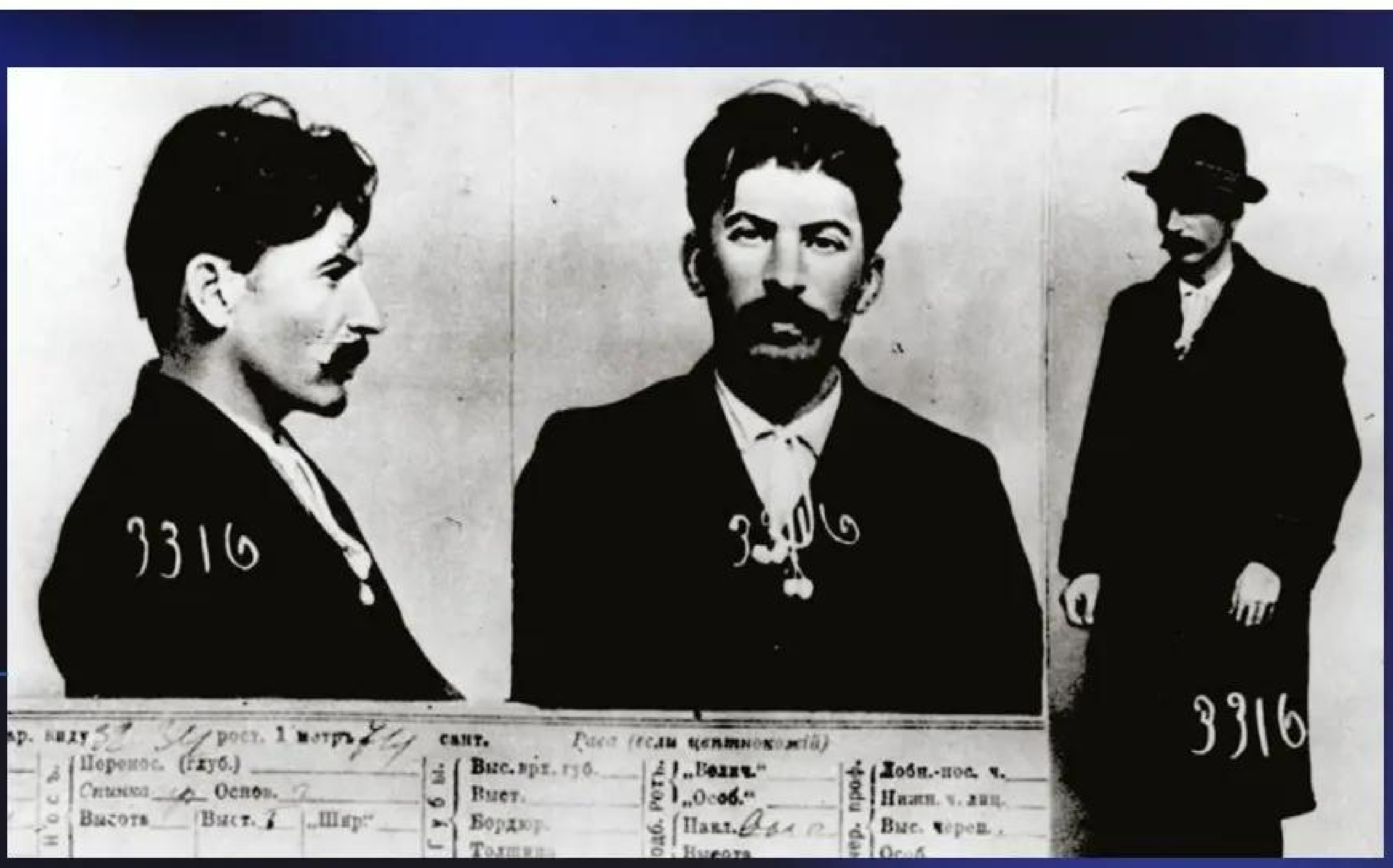
The man without mercy had already displayed his utter ruthlessness. In collectivising agriculture, Stalin liquidated an entire class of peasantry known as the kulaks, while the famine in the Ukraine that killed approximately 5 million people was the result of deliberate government policies. Historians now estimate that Stalin was responsible for the deaths of 15 million of his own countrymen.

Stalin married again in 1919. His second wife, Nadezhda Alliluyeva, gave him two children, a son and a daughter, but family life was strained and Nadezhda committed suicide in 1932. Stalin lived entirely for himself and had no interest in founding a dynasty; his children were not favoured. Yakov, his son by his first wife, also attempted suicide but missed; Stalin merely commented, "He can't even shoot straight." Yakov subsequently fought in the Soviet Army

DEFINING MOMENT

The young revolutionary 1902

After leaving his seminary education, Stalin embraced revolutionary politics and soon came to the notice of the tsar's secret police. After organising strikes and demonstrations against the tsar, Stalin was detained by the police and spent a year in prison before escaping early in 1904. In 1907, Stalin masterminded a bank robbery to obtain funds for his revolutionary work. As this mugshot shows, Stalin deliberately chose a slovenly and unprepossessing appearance, marking himself as a man apart from the usually impeccably dressed Marxist intellectuals. Stalin was deliberately rejecting middle-class values and portraying himself as a man of the people.



Timeline

Birth

Stalin's birth was as unpropitious as Napoleon's. Born in Georgia into a poor family, a long way from the centre of power and influence, nobody would have foreseen the impact he would have on history.

6/18 December 1879

Marriage

For the first and only time in his adult life, Stalin let someone else into his heart. When his wife, 'Kato' Svanidze, died in December 1907, Stalin permanently closed himself off to any future human vulnerability.

16/29 July 1906

Climbing the tree

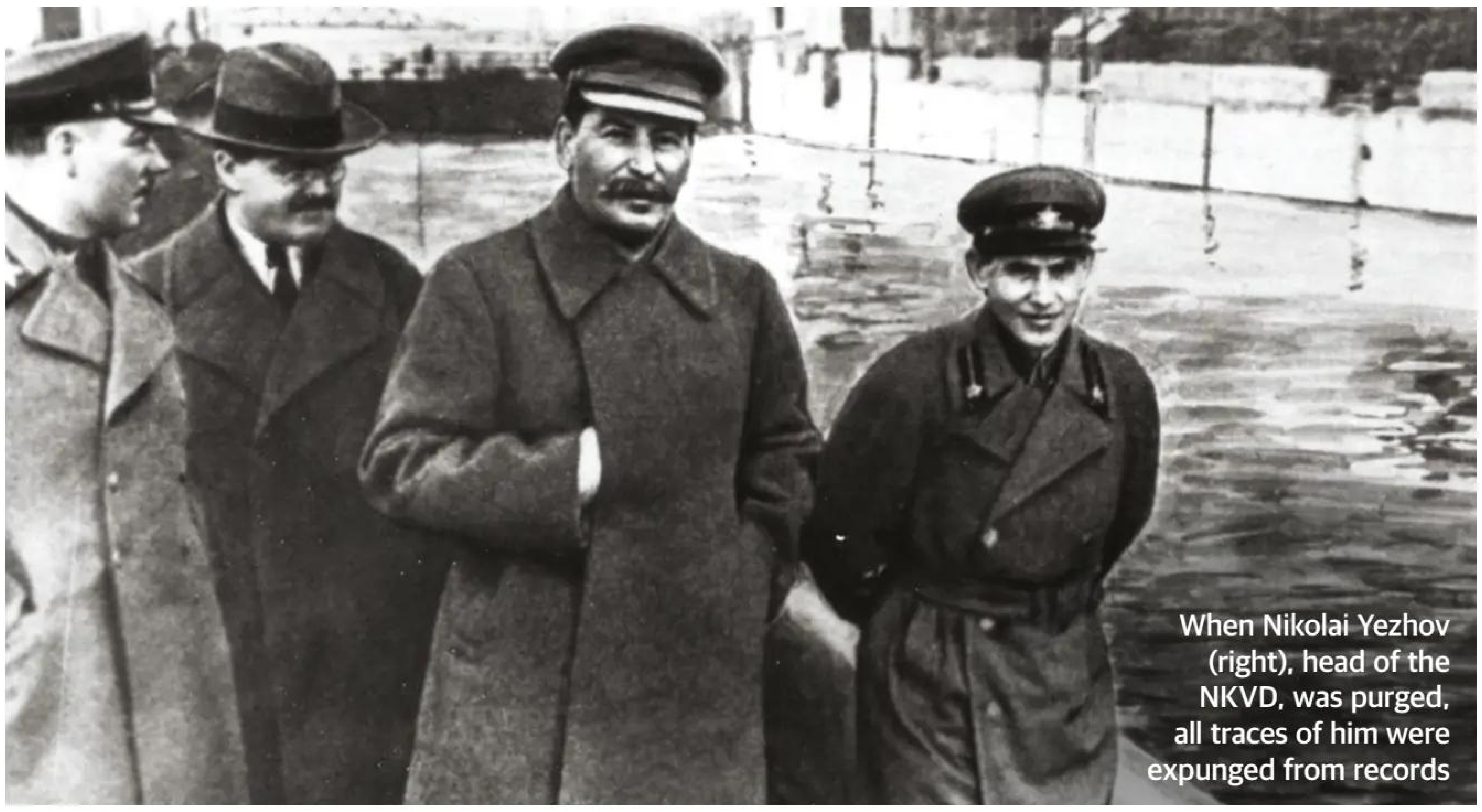
When civil war broke out after the October Revolution that brought the Bolsheviks to power, Lenin appointed Stalin to a five-man politburo alongside Trotsky. Stalin was now very near the centre of power in the new Russia.

1917

DEFINING MOMENT

Mastery 1924–1929

Lenin died on 21 January 1924. Stalin had manoeuvred himself into being Lenin's likely successor, which enabled him to suppress Lenin's criticism of him in the final testament Lenin had prepared. During the next five years, Stalin gradually isolated and removed his rivals in the Central Committee. Leon Trotsky was expelled from the Communist Party and went into exile, while men like Zinoviev and Kamenev, who had helped him against Trotsky, were themselves expelled from the party and only allowed to rejoin after they had submitted themselves totally to Stalin. Stalin was now more master than the tsar had ever been.



When Nikolai Yezhov (right), head of the NKVD, was purged, all traces of him were expunged from records

during World War II and was captured, dying in Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Vasily, his son by Nadezhda Alliluyeva, survived him but died from chronic alcoholism just before his 41st birthday, while his only daughter, Svetlana, eventually defected to the West, fleeing to America in 1967.

By the late 1930s, Stalin knew that he would have to face a showdown with Hitler's Germany at some point. But, preoccupied by internal politics and convinced that the pact his foreign minister, Molotov, had signed in 1939 would ensure German non-aggression, Stalin refused to listen to the increasingly agitated warnings of his military. When German forces rolled into Russia in June 1941, Stalin was caught completely unaware and was initially paralysed by indecision. But with the Germans pursuing brutal policies of ethnic cleansing, Stalin was able to rally the Russian people in what is known in Russia as the Great Patriotic War. In the titanic battles of Moscow, Leningrad, and Stalingrad, Hitler's armies were destroyed, and the Red Army began its relentless advance westwards.

With the Soviet Union bled white by its losses during the war, Stalin was determined to ensure that the countries the Red Army occupied became satellite states of the Soviet Union. At the Potsdam Conference in 1945, Stalin set out his terms, and by 1946 Winston Churchill had learned enough to say that "an iron curtain" was being drawn across the European continent. Stalin imposed communist governments on the countries of Eastern Europe, effectively drawing them under his control, while the former allies gazed with suspicion upon each other through the new curtain.

Communist sympathisers in America had passed enough information to the Russians for them to develop and build their own atomic bomb by 29 August 1949. With the Soviet Union now armed with nuclear weapons too, the first phase of the Cold War began. Stalin imposed a blockade on the Allied sectors of Berlin, but the Berlin airlift ensured that West Berlin remained an exclave within communist East Germany.

Despite his absolute mastery of the Soviet Union, Stalin remained paranoid, and in the early 1950s began another purge. But before it could begin properly Stalin was struck down by a stroke early on 1 March 1953. He'd given orders not to be disturbed when he went to bed, so his guards left him until 10 p.m. He was found lying by his bed, unable to move or speak, his pyjamas soaked in urine. The man who had killed millions of his own people spent his last four days trapped in his own body. Then, according to his daughter, his eyes opened for the final time with "a terrible look – either mad or angry and full of the fear of death". Stalin died at 9.50 p.m. on 5 March.

DEFINING MOMENT

The Great Patriotic War

22 June 1941 – 9 May 1945

Despite the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Hitler invaded the Soviet Union with the express aim of destroying the country and ethnically cleansing vast areas of Russia. He was clear he was fighting a war of extermination. After the initial shock, Stalin rallied Russia in the Great Patriotic War. In this inferno Stalin relaxed some of his old sanctions, allowing many churches of the Russian Orthodox Church to re-open and rewarding his best generals. Crucially, and unlike Hitler, Stalin quickly learned to leave the micro-management of the war to his generals while retaining control of the overall strategy.

Industrial revolution

The Russia Stalin ruled was a largely pre-industrial country. Stalin was determined to change that and began a process of centrally planned industrialisation organised into Five-Year Plans. It eventually worked, but at a great human cost.

1928-1938

Collectivisation

To force food production upwards, he instituted a policy whereby the smallholdings of peasants were consolidated into massive, state-run farms. When targets weren't met, he identified the kulaks, wealthier peasants, as his obstacle and liquidated them.

1928-1940

The Terror

Stalin's paranoid mind turned towards eliminating any possible rival. So he began the Great Terror, liquidating all the surviving Old Bolsheviks and purging the upper levels of the army and the party.

1934-1939

Molotov -Ribbentrop Pact

The Nazi and communist regimes, simultaneously watchful and fearful of each other, signed a non-aggression pact that also contained secret clauses carving up Eastern Europe between them. Stalin invaded Poland 16 days after Hitler did.

23 August 1939

Russia's bomb

The U.S. was the world's sole nuclear power for just four years. Thanks to extensive infiltration of the Manhattan Project, Soviet intelligence was able to provide enough information to Russian scientists for them to create their own atomic bomb.

29 August 1949

The end

After suffering a stroke on 1 March, Stalin was left trapped in his body while his magnates, terrified he might recover, dithered over sending for medical care. The fear he inspired condemned Stalin to four days of agony before he eventually died.

5 March 1953

The Cosmonauts

HOW THE USSR PIONEERED THE AGE OF HUMAN SPACEFLIGHT

Written by Giles Sparrow

The 1950s and early '60s saw the Soviet Union take a decisive lead in the new age of space exploration, leaving the United States trailing in its wake. So how did Soviet space scientists achieve so much, and why did the hammer-and-sickle flag never fly on the Moon?

The dawn of the Space Age came as a shock to almost everyone. U.S. plans to launch a satellite during the International Geophysical Year of 1957 to 1958 had been well publicised, but the Soviet space programme was widely assumed to trail far behind. So when Russian news agency TASS announced on 4 October 1957 that the beach ball-sized Sputnik 1 had successfully reached orbit, it shook long-held preconceptions of American technological superiority. By the time the U.S. launched its own satellite – Explorer 1 – in January 1958, the Soviets had also launched Sputnik 2, carrying a doomed passenger in the form of a mongrel dog, Laika.

One reason for the early Soviet advantage lay in the power of their launch vehicles and in their alternative use as ballistic missiles. Both Cold War rivals had poured resources into rocket programmes not out of a thirst to explore space, nor even for propaganda, but because rockets were a potentially unstoppable weapons-delivery system with which to threaten their enemies. The ultimate warhead for such a missile was a nuclear weapon, but while U.S. scientists had developed lightweight, super-powerful hydrogen bombs by the early 1950s, the Soviets were still reliant on much heavier, less powerful fission bombs, so from the outset they needed a larger missile capable of carrying heavier payloads.

Both U.S. and Soviet programmes used captured engineers and technology from Nazi Germany's wartime V2 missile project, but the Americans squandered an early advantage, allowing the work of the core German 'Rocket Team' (now on the payroll of the U.S. Army and led by the controversial Wernher von Braun) to become bogged down in inter-service politics. The Soviets, in contrast, had a home-grown genius to lead their effort in the form of Sergei Korolev, a brilliant engineer who had helped pioneer Soviet rocketry in the 1930s.

Korolev was obsessed with using rockets for spaceflight, and as head of the OKB-1 engineering and design bureau, he played a skilful political game to convince Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev that a satellite would be a propaganda coup. But after his first success he found himself under huge pressure to deliver more space 'spectaculars'. Sputnik 2 was an early response (although it's now clear the Soviets lied about how long Laika survived in space), and further satellites and probes continued to push the limits – but the next landmark achievement was clearly to put a human in space.

Korolev's team had begun designing a manned space capsule as early as 1955, but even with a suitable launch vehicle, the project was a formidable challenge. Launching a cosmonaut and bringing them safely back to Earth required development of a spacecraft capable of supporting a human being through the stresses of launch, protecting them for long periods in the vacuum of space, and shielding them from the fiery re-entry into Earth's atmosphere. The final design, known as Vostok, consisted of a spherical descent module housing the cosmonaut and a conical instrument module based on the Sputnik satellites.

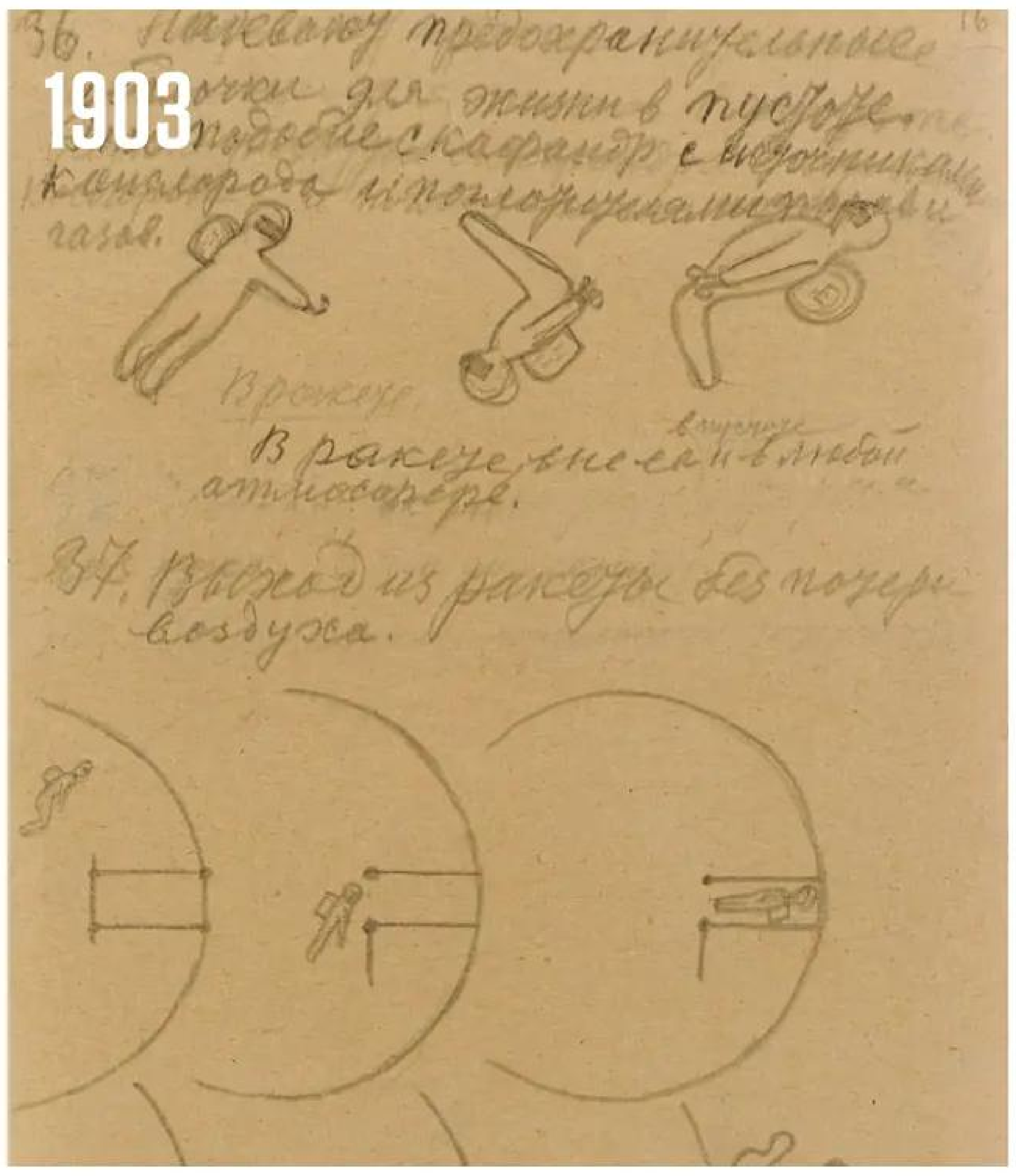
Just as important as the spacecraft were the cosmonauts who would travel in it. An initial group of 20 candidates were selected from among military jet pilots who volunteered for an unspecified test programme in 1959. Training was overseen by celebrated Soviet aviator General Nikolai Kamanin and included a huge range of endurance tests for gravity and space sickness, varying oxygen levels, extremes of temperature, and isolated, confined conditions. The candidates also attended lectures on spaceflight, although these mainly focused on biomedical issues (despite the qualifications of the pilots, the Vostok missions were to be controlled entirely from the ground).

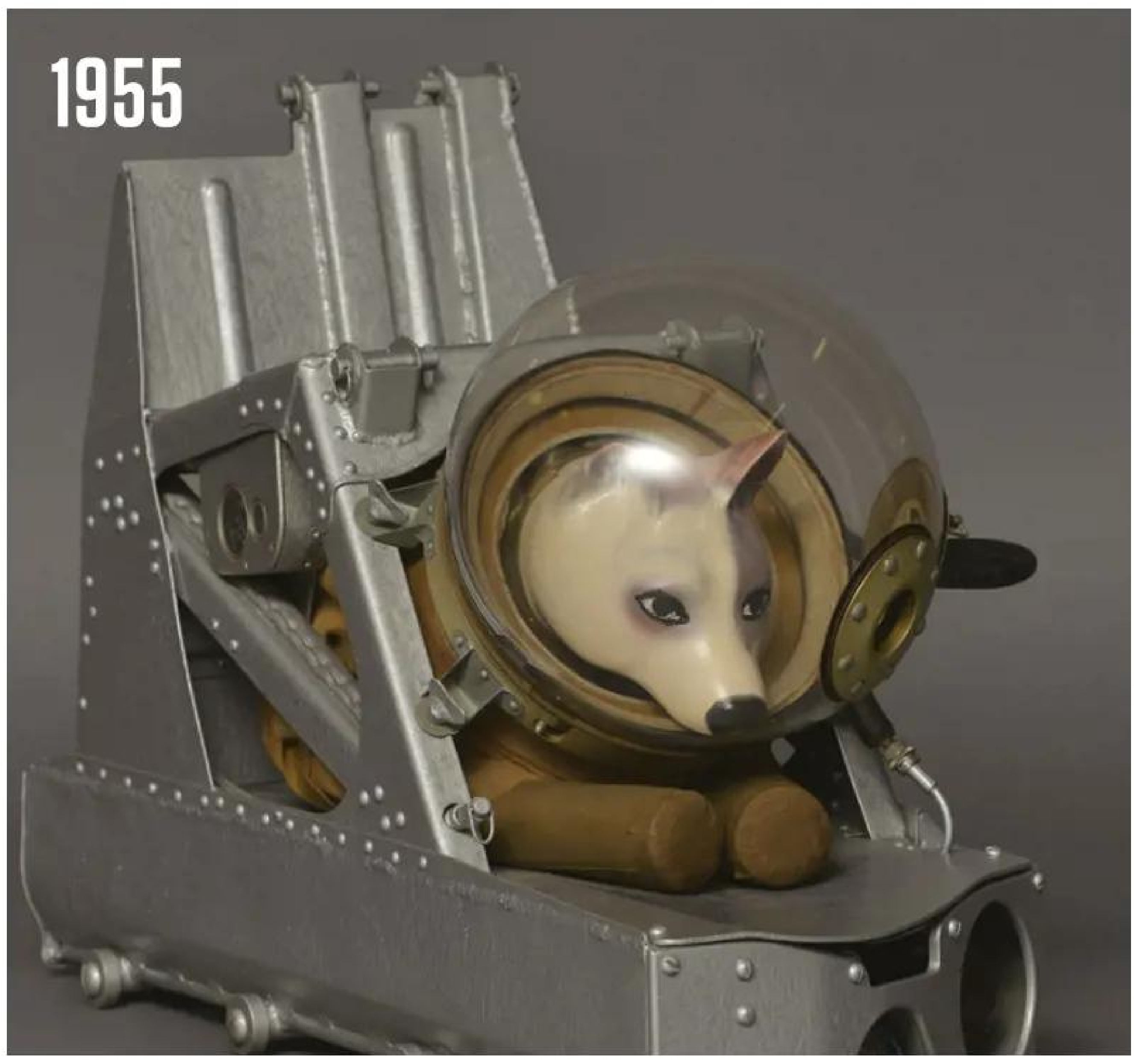
By June 1960, a core group of six cosmonauts were moved to the specially built Star City complex outside Moscow for more intensive training, including spacecraft simulations. Unmanned test flights also began, including some in which dogs were safely returned to Earth. Despite some later rumours, the Soviets were cautious about risking their cosmonauts' lives, and arguments continued until late March 1961 about the decision to launch. Once the go-ahead was given, Korolev and Kamanin's choice of pilot for Vostok 1 came down to two names: Gherman Titov and Yuri Gagarin.

Vostok 1 launched into space on 12 April 1961, orbiting Earth once in 108 minutes and writing Yuri Gagarin's name into the history books. Once again, the U.S. was left behind. Delays in the development of boosters suitable for launching large spacecraft meant that their initial response, in early May, was to launch the Mercury Spacecraft Freedom 7 on a sub-orbital 'hop' piloted by Alan Shepard.

Korolev's team found themselves under increasing pressure to deliver further spectaculars. Titov finally flew aboard Vostok 2 for a whole day in August 1961, and a year later Vostoks 3 and 4 flew in space at the same time. In June 1963, another dual flight (Vostoks 5 and 6) saw Valentina Tereshkova become the first woman in space. By this time, however, the rules of the game were changing. Shortly after Shepard's flight in 1961, U.S. President John F. Kennedy had given his country a long-term goal of reaching the Moon before the end of the

Space Race timeline


1903
В ракете вне её и в любой атмосфере.
37. Выход из ракеты без потери воздуха.



USSR

1903
Russian schoolteacher Konstantin Tsiolkovsky publishes a breakthrough paper explaining the importance of rocket engines for space exploration. In dozens of books and articles, he sets out a vision for the space age, including multi-stage rockets, spacecraft, and spacesuits, though he is largely ignored until after the Russian Revolution of 1917.

1950s
Soviet scientists use dogs as test subjects during rocket development. Most return to Earth safely, using bizarre devices such as this 'ejector seat' shown above. Laika, the passenger on Sputnik 2, is the only one to be launched with no hope of return, as a re-entry system cannot be developed in time to meet Khrushchev's demands for another quick spectacular.

October 1957
Sputnik 1 is launched using a three-stage rocket based on the Soviet R-7 Semyorka ballistic missile. It enters a highly elliptical orbit ranging from 215 to 939 kilometres (134 to 583 miles) above Earth's surface, sending back a signal that is picked up by radio operators around the world.

1961
Vladimir Chelomei proposes a rival Moon rocket to Korolev's.

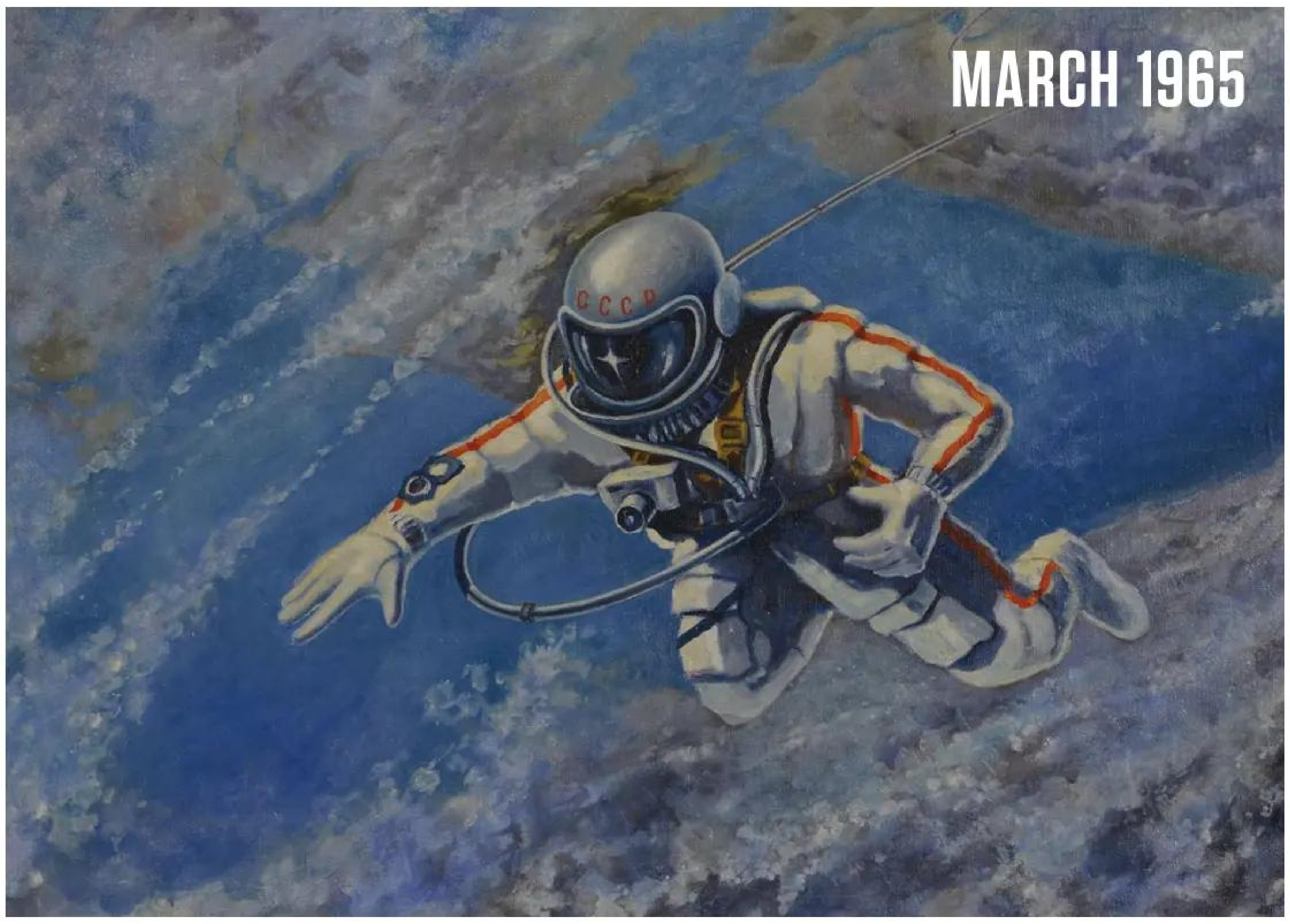
U.S.

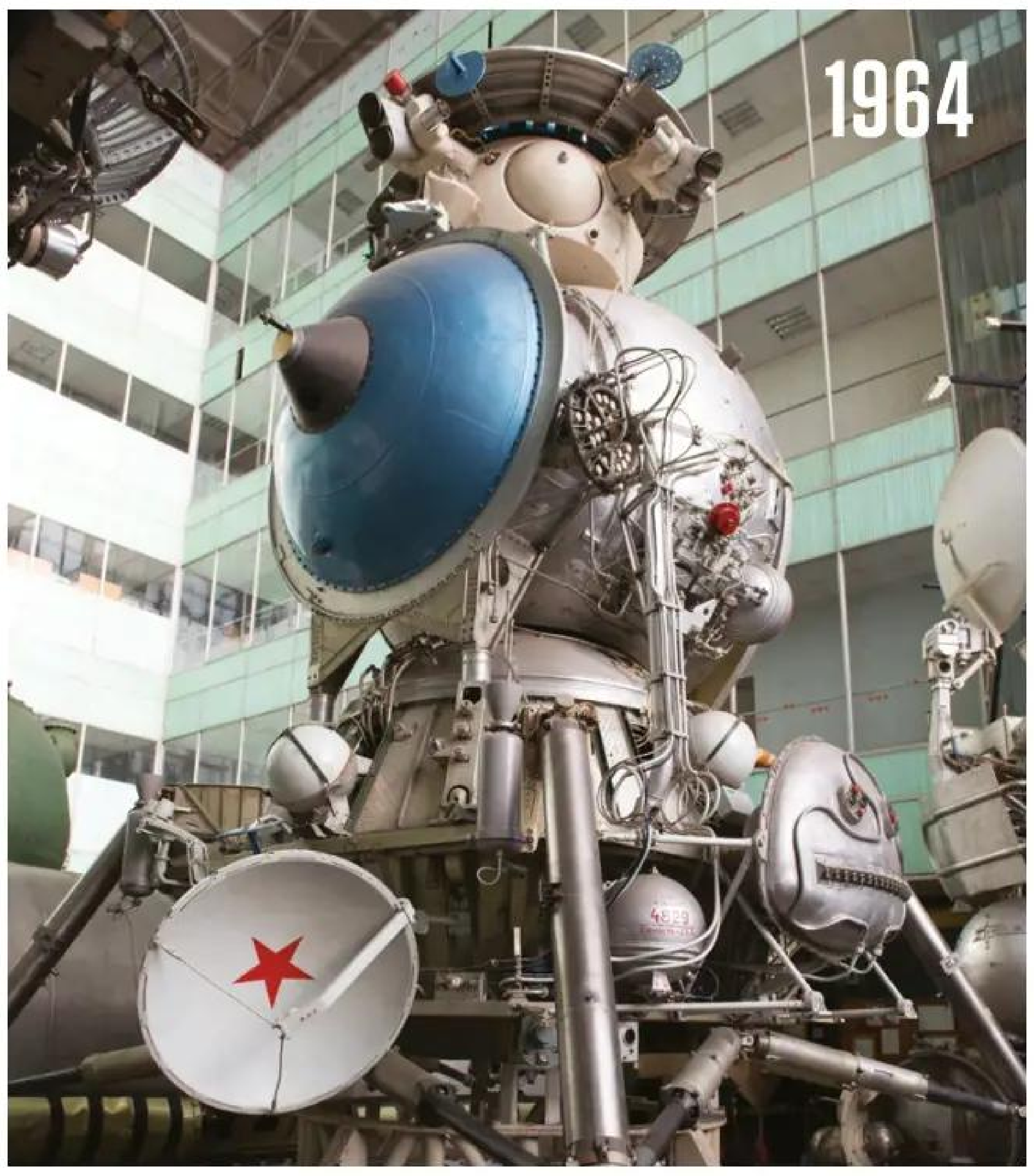
March 1926
U.S. engineer Robert H. Goddard launches the first liquid-fuelled rocket.

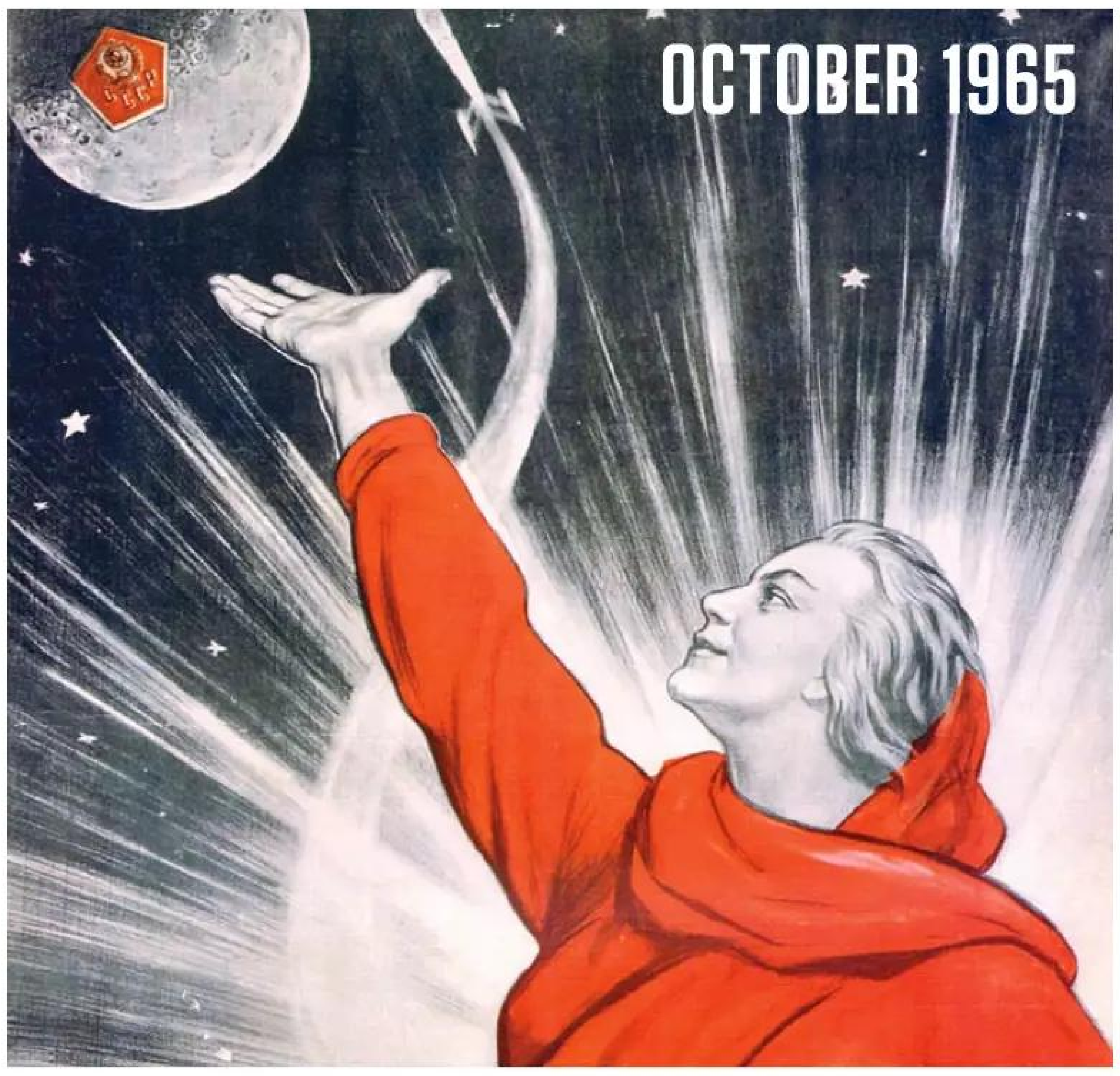
1945
Both U.S. and Soviet forces capture German rocket components and scientists.

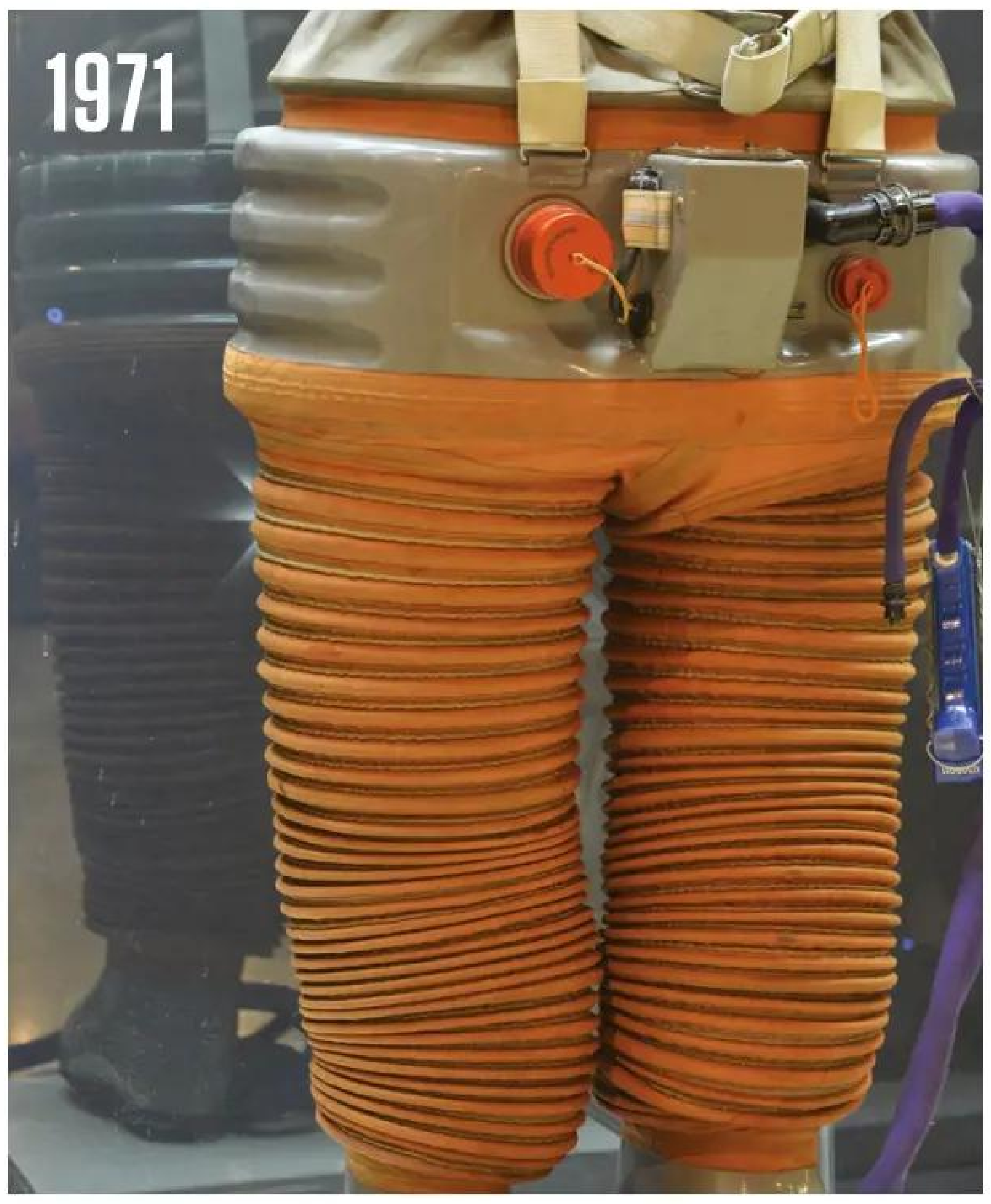
July 1955
The U.S. announces plans to launch a satellite in 1957-58.

January 1958
The U.S. launches the Explorer 1 satellite using Wernher von Braun's Juno rocket.









April 1961
Yuri Gagarin prepares for launch in the cramped confines of his Vostok 1 spacecraft. The ultimate choice of Russia's first cosmonaut may have been swung by Gagarin's peasant background, which was similar to that of Khrushchev and deemed particularly fitting for a hero of the USSR.

May 1961
President Kennedy announces the goal of putting a man on the Moon.

February 1962
John Glenn, one of the 'Mercury Seven', becomes the first U.S. astronaut to orbit the Earth.

1964
The Lunniy Korabl lander is the focus of Korolev's lunar mission, planned to launch in combination with a Soyuz-based spacecraft using the huge N1 rocket. Unlike the two-man Apollo lander, the module plans to carry just a single cosmonaut to the Moon's surface.

March 1965
Alexei Leonov's daring spacewalk from Voskhod 2 proves to be the last of the Soviet space spectaculars. It nearly costs Leonov his life after his spacesuit inflates in the vacuum, leaving him unable to re-enter the capsule. He survives by opening a release valve that lets air escape from the suit.

March 1965
The first manned mission of NASA's Gemini programme is launched to low-Earth orbit.

October 1965
In an attempt to settle the infighting, the Soviet Government orders preparation for a manned lunar flyby mission by 1967, using Chelomei's UR-500 launcher and Korolev's Soyuz spacecraft, while work continues on the giant N1 launcher for a later Moon landing.

April 1967
The failure of Soyuz 1 further derails Soviet lunar plans.

October 1968
NASA launches Apollo 7 to test the Apollo Command/ Service module (CSM) in orbit.

July 1969
The Apollo 11 mission puts American astronauts on the Moon.

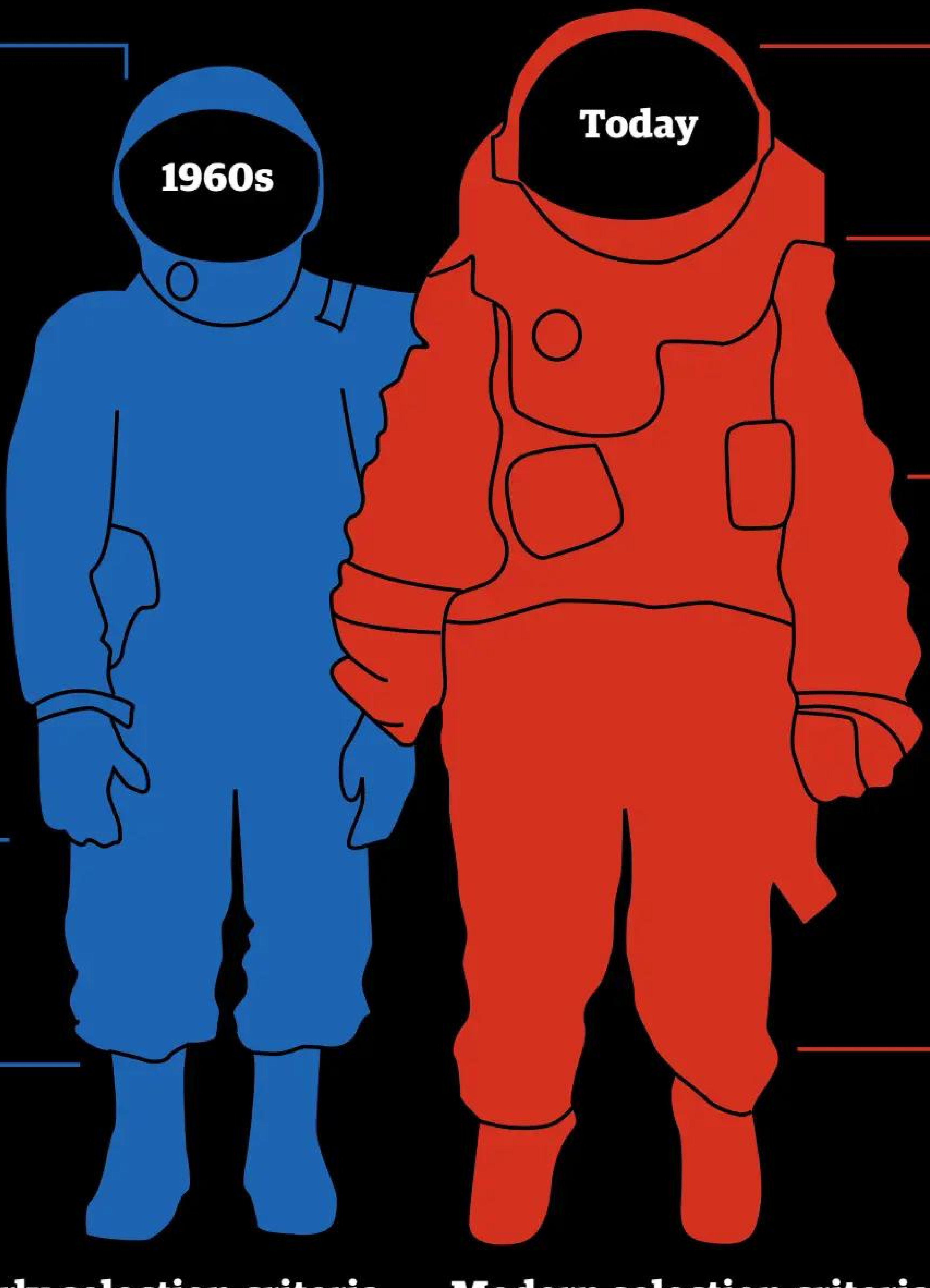
1970
The Soviet Government begins cancelling manned lunar projects.

1971 onwards
The Soviet space programme begins to focus on long-duration spaceflight and orbiting space stations. Devices such as the Chibis suit are engineered to help cosmonauts remain fit in orbit; the suit is designed to pull blood and bodily fluids away from the torso, where they accumulate in microgravity conditions.

“Political pressure on space scientists to keep delivering short-term ‘firsts’ was an unwanted distraction”

Ready to fly?

THE SELECTION CRITERIA FOR THE FIRST COSMONAUTS WERE VERY DIFFERENT FROM THOSE APPLIED BY TODAY'S RUSSIAN SPACE PROGRAMME



Early selection criteria **Modern selection criteria**

MILITARY PILOT
Although early cosmonauts were effectively passengers, jet pilots were considered well-suited to cope with the stresses of a spaceflight. Valentina Tereshkova, an experienced parachutist, was given an honorary Air Force rank before her mission.

AGE BELOW 30
Cosmonauts needed to combine their flight experience with relative youth, as no one could anticipate the physical effects of spaceflight.

GOOD HEALTH
Prior to selection, candidates were screened for chronic health problems. Even minor illness could threaten a pilot with substitution.

PARTY MEMBERSHIP
Given the highly political nature of the Vostok missions, pilots had to be upstanding members of the Soviet Communist Party.

WEIGHT AND HEIGHT
The first cosmonauts could be no more than 1.75m (5.7ft) tall due to the cramped spacecraft, with a maximum weight of 75kg (165lb).

EDUCATION
Today's cosmonauts are more likely to be skilled mission specialists educated to degree level or higher.

HEALTH AND AGE
There are no longer direct age restrictions, but candidates (including paying passengers) must display good health and physical fitness.

HEIGHT AND WEIGHT
Today's Soyuz spacecraft can accommodate three cosmonauts with heights of up to 1.9m (6.2ft) and weights of up to 95kg (209lb).

SPONSORSHIP
The Soyuz spacecraft often carries U.S. and European astronauts as well as Russians as part of partnership agreements with other space agencies. A few wealthy passengers have even paid for a ticket into space.

TRAINING
Modern cosmonauts still undergo intensive training at Star City, where they work on spacecraft simulators and testing their endurance to the maximum on parabolic 'weightless' flights.

decade. Korolev had similar ambitions and an advanced spacecraft design called Soyuz that he hoped could do the job.

But political pressure on space scientists to keep delivering short-term 'firsts' was an unwanted distraction, even if it maintained the image of Soviet space superiority. The final Vostok missions were followed by two risky Voskhod flights using a heavily adapted version of the original one-man spacecraft to set new landmarks. Voskhod 1 took a cramped three-man crew into orbit, while Voskhod 2 carried two men in full spacesuits, allowing cosmonaut Alexei Leonov to open the access hatch and become the first man to walk in space.

Another problem was the fragmented nature of the Soviet space effort. Rival designers worked in separate engineering bureaus, often refusing to cooperate with each other and constantly jostling for attention, political favour, and funding. Throughout the early 1960s, priorities were constantly changing, with overlapping or contradictory projects being approved, merged, and cancelled.

It was not until 1964 that Korolev was finally given overall control of the Soviet lunar programme. Development of the enormous N1 Moon rocket was formally approved in early 1965, but problems still continued, with numerous technical delays and obstruction from Korolev's rivals. By this time, Korolev's health had been failing for several years, and in January 1966 he died from complications during routine colon surgery at the age of just 59.

His death left the Soviet space programme rudderless. After the problems of the early 1960s, it is doubtful that even Korolev could have beaten America to the Moon, but his successors certainly could not. Soviet ambitions to send cosmonauts to the Moon and beyond faded slowly, but perhaps the worst blow came in April 1967, when Vladimir Komarov died during the emergency re-entry of Soyuz 1 – a mission launched under intense political pressure with poor planning and an untested spacecraft. The Soviets had achieved so much, but their luck had finally run out.

Nevertheless, the Soviet space programme rose again. The problems with Soyuz were resolved, and in time it became the most successful and reliable manned launch system, allowing cosmonauts of the 1970s and 1980s to carry out increasingly ambitious missions to a series of Salyut and Mir space stations.

Following the fall of the Soviet Union, the rival design bureaus were finally unified in 1992 under a single space agency named Roscosmos. OKB-1, Korolev's former bureau, today continues as the private company RSC Energia, the prime contractor for Russian manned spaceflight. As a result, its legacy continues to survive on board the International Space Station and in the spacecraft that crew and supply it today.

© Alamy; Getty Images; ROSIZO; Russian Academy of Sciences ; The Museum of Cosmonautics; The Science Museum

All smiles

Grinning for the cameras, U.S. President John F. Kennedy and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev appeared to be on friendly terms on the eve of a summit in Vienna in June 1961. Held in the wake of America's controversial invasion of Cuba, the meeting proved to be a bruising encounter for an ill-prepared Kennedy, who later confessed to a reporter that "it was the worst thing in my life. He savaged me." The main topics discussed in the Austrian capital were the volatile situation in Laos (at the time the small Asian nation was rocked by civil war, with the U.S. and Soviets backing opposing sides) and the potential reunification of Germany – a prospect Khrushchev feared could plant the seeds for another world war. From an American perspective the summit was deemed a failure, and in little over a year Kennedy and Khrushchev would face off again during the Cuban Missile Crisis, 13 days that came perilously close to plunging the world into a nuclear apocalypse.

Image source: Alamy

The Cold War wanes

WITH AN AILING ECONOMY AND A NEW LEADER, THE SOVIET UNION GRADUALLY FELL APART, HERALDING THE END OF THE COLD WAR

With the dawn of the 1980s, the communist bloc began unravelling, and with the demise of the Soviet Union, the Cold War passed into history. During the 69-year existence of the Soviet Union, only seven men led the communist nation. Within the span of 30 months during the early 1980s, three of these - Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov, and Konstantin Chernenko - died. With them perished the influence of a generation of hardline communists, and though it may not have been readily apparent, the days of the Soviet superpower were also numbered.

Leonid Brezhnev ruled the country as general secretary of the Communist Party for 18 years, but Andropov and Chernenko followed with a combined brief tenure from November 1982 to March 1985. With the death of Chernenko, Mikhail Gorbachev stepped into the breach. At the age of 54, Gorbachev was 20 years younger than his predecessor, and while offering something of a fresh perspective on the world, he also inherited a myriad of challenges.

The winds of political change had gained renewed velocity among the nations of the Soviet Bloc. In Poland, the Solidarity trade union gave voice to workers who sought

democratic reforms. Elsewhere, latent nationalism and a yearning for democratic government were preparing to burst forth across Eastern Europe. Within the Soviet Union itself, the Baltic States were clamouring for independence while restless peoples with their own sense of nationalism or ethnicity urged greater autonomy. In truth, non-Russian Soviet citizens had never fully embraced the concept of a real 'union', one that required them to assimilate into a national consciousness dominated by Russia.

However, the most immediate concern for Gorbachev was the obvious stagnation of the Soviet economy. Decades of planning had failed to deliver the promise of plenty, with the policy of resources being drawn from those according to their ability and redistributed in a classless society according to need bearing little fruit.

Eastern Europeans looked on with envy at the prosperous economies of the Western democracies, which had emerged from the doldrums of their own recessions in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In the USSR, store shelves were bare and shortages of foodstuffs, fuel, and other essentials plagued the people. East Germans perhaps felt the pinch of privation more keenly than any, just across the heavily guarded border from the flourishing, industrialised economic colossus of West Germany.

In a futile effort to prop up a pro-Soviet regime in Afghanistan, the Red Army was embroiled in a lengthy war against a primarily Islamist-driven insurgency. The cost in lives and money weighed heavily on the Soviet leadership, particularly in concert with the tremendous expense of the still competitive nuclear arms race. Building and maintaining the Soviet military machine had compromised the capacity of the Soviet economy to offer even modest improvements to its citizens' standard of living.

When Gorbachev came to power, he fully intended to hold the 15 republics of the Soviet Union together under the central government in Moscow, but the surge for independence and reform both within and outside the Soviet Union was undeniable. In the past, the threat of armed intervention by the mailed fist of the Soviet military had held independence movements in check. Now, however, Gorbachev could no longer completely depend on the leaders in satellite countries or the Soviet republics themselves to maintain control of their own populaces. Should the situation get out of hand during this perilous time, the military alternative was too disheartening to contemplate.

In the midst of such turmoil, relations with the United States had chilled with the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan and the U.S. retaliatory boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympics in Moscow. In November of that year, an overwhelming majority of the American electorate had propelled Ronald Reagan to the presidency, and the Soviet Union's traditional Cold War rival stepped up

President Ronald Reagan delivers an impassioned address at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin calling upon Mikhail Gorbachev to "Tear down this wall!"

Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev and President Ronald Reagan sign the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in Washington, D.C.

"In his speech to the united nations, Gorbachev pledged to convert the Soviet economy from one of armaments to an economy of disarmament"

the pressure. By the autumn of 1983, relations between the superpowers had reached a new low when a Soviet fighter jet downed Korean Airlines Flight 007 over the Sea of Japan, killing 269 people, including Georgia congressman Larry McDonald.

The Reagan administration sensed an opportunity. Amid protests from anti-nuclear groups, in 1983 the United States deployed medium-range nuclear cruise and Pershing II missiles to Western Europe in response to the Soviet refusal to dismantle its own medium-range SS-20 ballistic missiles. That same year, Reagan announced the U.S. commitment to its Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), popularly known as Star Wars, an anti-missile system based in outer space. The Soviets recoiled with concern that such a system would give the U.S. first-strike capability. Although it was years from deployment, the mere possibility that such a system might become operational was sobering.

The pragmatic Reagan also realised that the Soviets faced unprecedented economic pressure. He purposefully charted a course of revitalising the American military to address a perceived lack of parity in nuclear and conventional forces. The emphasis on restoring the U.S. military and its corresponding escalation in expenditures would oblige the Soviets to keep pace, further intensifying their already woeful economic situation, while in the near future the U.S. would urge negotiations on arms reduction from a position of strength.

Reagan's rhetoric also struck a worldwide chord. In a speech to the British House of Commons, he proclaimed that "freedom and democracy will leave Marxism and Leninism on the ash heap of history." He referred to the Soviet Union as an "evil empire". On 12 June 1987, the president stood in the shadow of the Brandenburg Gate in the divided city of Berlin. For more than a quarter of a century, the Berlin Wall had stood as a symbol of Cold War politics, posturing, and pain. Reagan boldly intoned, "General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalisation, come here to this gate. Mr Gorbachev, open this gate. Mr Gorbachev, tear down this wall!"

Indeed, the ascendance of Gorbachev had fostered opportunity. The new Soviet leader was compelled to address the deteriorating economic conditions. However, doing so required turning the focus of the government inward, which in turn meant reducing global tensions and curbing the military spending that had impoverished the USSR.

To implement his agenda, Gorbachev did have one strong card to play - nuclear arms reduction. He demonstrated a willingness to negotiate, and between the autumn of 1985 and the spring of 1988, the two most powerful men in the world held four summit meetings. At Reykjavik, Iceland, in 1986, they discussed abolishing nuclear weapons. In December 1987, they concluded a landmark achievement of Cold War diplomacy: an entire class of nuclear weapons was eliminated with the signing of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in Washington. Within months Gorbachev declared his intent to withdraw Soviet forces from Afghanistan.

Reagan and Gorbachev developed a personal relationship that facilitated their negotiations, providing both with precious time because of the tangible results they achieved. In May 1988, Reagan stood in Red Square within the fortress walls of the

A Soviet-built T-55 tank sits before the Opera House in Bucharest, Romania, during the revolution that overthrew Nicolae Ceaușescu

Kremlin. With Gorbachev by his side, the president declared that he no longer believed the Soviet Union was an evil empire. When a reporter pressed him on the subject, Reagan responded, "You are talking about another time, another era."

On 7 December 1988, Gorbachev addressed the United Nations General Assembly in New York. His words were electrifying. The Soviet leader spoke of global interdependence and "pan-humanist" values, dismissing class warfare, the basis of Soviet foreign policy for the previous 70 years. He pledged to convert the Soviet economy from one of "armaments to an economy of disarmament". His most stunning pronouncement was the assurance that the Soviet military would reduce its ground forces by half a million troops, that 50,000 soldiers would be withdrawn from Eastern Europe, and that arms would be reduced by 800 aircraft, 8,500 artillery systems, and 10,000 tanks within two years.

Gorbachev added, "Finally, being on U.S. soil, but also for other, understandable reasons, I cannot but turn to the subject of our relations with this great country… Relations between the Soviet Union and the United States of America span five and a half decades. The world has changed, and so have the nature, role, and place of these relations in world politics. For too long they were built under the banner of confrontation, and sometimes of hostility, either open or concealed. But in the last few years, throughout the world people were able to heave a sigh of relief, thanks to the changes for the better in the substance and atmosphere of the relations between Moscow and Washington."

While Gorbachev pursued a foreign policy of reconciliation, he implemented a two-pronged policy of reform within the Soviet

Key facts SOME INTERESTING EVENTS RELATED TO THE FINAL YEARS OF THE COLD WAR

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FACT 1: Shortages of consumer goods in the Soviet Union became so severe that citizens were required to present coupons to buy socks.

★

FACT 2: To damage the Soviet economy, the U.S. pressed Saudi Arabia to increase oil production, devaluing the Soviet Union's primary export.

★

FACT 3: Although Ronald Reagan and Gorbachev were friendly, it's understood that First Lady Nancy Reagan and Raisa Gorbacheva endured an icy relationship.

★

FACT 4: Against the advice of government officials, President Reagan chose not to delete from his Berlin speech the thunderous "Tear down this wall!"

★

FACT 5: In 2004, Mikhail Gorbachev travelled to the United States to represent Russia at the funeral of former president Ronald Reagan.

Protestors take to the streets in Dushanbe, capital of Soviet Tajikistan, February 1990

Union. Glasnost, or 'openness', allowed greater personal freedoms, particularly freedom of speech and discourse on emerging political and social issues. Perestroika, or 'rebuilding', was a programme of reform that Gorbachev hoped would stimulate the economy.

Meanwhile, President George H. W. Bush took office in the U.S. and initiated a reassessment of the nation's strategic objectives. Sceptics doubted the sincerity of Gorbachev's efforts. Others openly questioned their potential for success. Nevertheless, good relations were maintained between Washington and Moscow.

Gorbachev's sweeping reforms sent a clear message throughout the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Glasnost fostered an exchange of new ideas and released decades of pent-up anxiety and dissatisfaction. While the government did not interfere with the newly found freedom of expression, the economic benefits of perestroika did not immediately produce the positive results Gorbachev had hoped for. Glasnost allowed criticism of his policies to spread.

While Gorbachev's intentions were noble, the pace of events soon outstripped his ability to exert control. The landmark address to the UN opened the floodgates for rapid political and socioeconomic change in Eastern Europe. Gorbachev had virtually assured those who would accelerate regime change that the Red Army would not intervene. The former Soviet Bloc began to crumble.

Remarkably, most of the political reforms that occurred in Eastern Europe were accomplished peacefully. In the spring and summer of 1988, a pair of massive labour strikes brought the communist regime in Poland to the negotiating table. Communist rule ended within a year, and the first parliamentary elections were held; Lech Wałęsa would be elected president of Poland in December 1989.

On 23 October 1989, the Republic of Hungary was proclaimed. Free elections took place the next spring. Simultaneously, the barrier between Hungary and neighbouring Austria was torn down without Soviet interference. Communist rule ended in Czechoslovakia in December 1989 as thousands of protesters shook keys in front of communist officials and taunted them with the chant "Your time is up!" Free elections occurred seven months later.

On 15 January 1990, the national assembly of Bulgaria abolished the rule guaranteeing the leading role of the communist party.

Yugoslavia started to disintegrate as Slovenia and Croatia declared independence. Years of civil war and ethnic cleansing followed. While unrest continues in the Balkans, the nations of the former Yugoslavia currently include Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia, FYR Macedonia, and Serbia. Violence erupted in Romania, and communist dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife, Elena, were tried and executed on 25 December 1991.

The most dramatic change of government in Eastern Europe occurred in Germany. Erich Honecker, leader of the communist German Democratic Republic (GDR), was deposed by his own party in October 1989 just as the communists celebrated 40 years of the GDR. Two days after the observance, 70,000 protesters took to the streets of Berlin. A month later, Soviet troops stood aside and East German guards opened several gates along the Berlin Wall. Crowds soon gathered, and the Wall was torn down with sledgehammers in a flurry of freedom. East and West Germany were formally reunited in 1990.

Spending into oblivion

AN AILING SOVIET ECONOMY HELPED TO END THE COLD WAR

Along with numerous political, diplomatic and social factors, the economic distress experienced in the Soviet Union in the 1980s was a major factor in ending the Cold War.

Although accurate figures may never be known, defence spending was undeniably prominent among the economic influencers of the Soviet Union's downfall. Some estimates suggest that in the mid-1980s up to 70 per cent of Soviet industrial output was devoted to the military. A KGB official who defected to the UK during the period suggested that at least one-third of Soviet industrial output was related to military spending. Western intelligence estimates placed Soviet military expenditure at between 12 and 20 per cent of the nation's gross national product. In 1987, the Soviet Union spent the equivalent of $128 billion on defence.

A study conducted in 1995 concluded that the United States had spent the truly astronomical sum of $4 trillion on the nuclear arms race during the Cold War.

"Crowds soon gathered, and the Berlin Wall was torn down with sledgehammers in a flurry of freedom"

A month after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Gorbachev and Bush met on the island of Malta in the Mediterranean. Discussions concerning the reunification of Germany, the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty, and the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) were held. When the summit ended, a member of Gorbachev's staff told the media, "We buried the Cold War at the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea."

Gorbachev further demonstrated his good faith in the summer of 1990 by refraining from interference with U.S. efforts to assemble a military coalition to confront Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein and forcibly remove Iraqi forces from neighbouring Kuwait.

At the same time, however, the cohesion of the Soviet Union, which Gorbachev had long sought to maintain, eroded rapidly. Estonia had demanded independence back in 1987, and the other Baltic States of Lithuania and Latvia followed suit. Separatist movements in other non-Russian republics intensified, and Gorbachev faced a serious dilemma. Glasnost had given impetus to these movements, but his promises of reform would ring hollow were he to intervene via military or political means.

The Estonian initiative sparked independence movements across the Soviet Union, including Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Belarus, and the republics of Central Asia. By mid-1990, many of them had declared their independence from Soviet rule.

In desperation, a group of hardline communist leaders hatched a coup d'état on 19 August 1991, kidnapping Gorbachev, holding him at a secret location in the resort town of Foros in the Crimea, and falsely announcing on state-run radio that the general secretary was ill and no longer able to hold office. The attempted coup ignited protests across the decaying Soviet Union, and when the hardliners attempted to mobilise the army to quell the disturbances, the soldiers refused to follow orders.

Boris Yeltsin, who had recently been elected president of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic in the first election in Russian history, opposed the coup and with the backing of the Soviet citizenry called for the arrest of the conspirators. Within three days the plot fell apart as the hardliners surrendered. Yeltsin had already begun to exert significant influence on the course of events and openly criticised the slow pace of Gorbachev's economic reforms. As Gorbachev's power ebbed, the Bush administration gravitated closer to Yeltsin, by now the de facto power broker among the leaders of the former Soviet republics.

Although Gorbachev survived the coup, his political capital had been virtually wiped out. In a last-ditch effort to keep the Soviet Union together, he had proposed a union treaty that would provide greater autonomy to the republics. However, it was readily apparent that the reform movements would stop at nothing short of democracy.

On 6 November 1991, Yeltsin's government voted to ban all activities of the Communist Party in Russia. Yeltsin met with the leaders of Ukraine and Belarus on 8 December and agreed to form a new governmental entity, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which included 11 former Soviet republics.

Powerless to hold back the tide of rapid change, Gorbachev met Yeltsin on 17 December 1991 and acknowledged the formation of the CIS. On 25 December, Gorbachev resigned. In his farewell address, the former Soviet leader lamented his failed attempt to keep the Soviet Union together, expressing concern "about the fact that the people in this country are ceasing to become citizens of a great power and the consequences may be very difficult for all of us to deal with".

He justifiably claimed that he had presided over the Soviet journey down the "road to democracy" and had begun the arduous task of moving the nation's stagnant communist economy towards one embracing free enterprise and open markets.

Tremendous change lay ahead for the former Soviet Union. The newly emerging republics had to refine their own political systems, energise their own economies, settle territorial issues, and sometimes battle armed insurgencies and civil unrest. Naturally, so much remained uncertain. However, there was one absolute certainty. The Cold War, which had brought the world to the brink of a nuclear apocalypse and defined so much of global politics for decades, was over.

Fiery retribution in Romania

HOW THE MOST HARDLINE COMMUNIST LEADER IN EUROPE WAS FINALLY BROUGHT TO ACCOUNT

Nicolae Ceaușescu came to power as general secretary of the Romanian Communist Party in 1965 and was proclaimed president of Romania in 1974. Initially moderate, his administration became increasingly authoritarian through the years. Ceaușescu maintained strict control of the media and crushed opposition with a Stalinist hand through his brutal secret police, the Securitate. Ceaușescu established an autocracy blending communism, nationalism, and a pervasive cult of personality.

Like other Eastern European nations, Romania experienced economic decline in the 1980s. However, Ceaușescu's own policies contributed significantly to the erosion of the Romanian standard of living. Unrest grew steadily during the mid-1980s. When Ceaușescu ordered government troops to fire on protesters on 17 December 1989, he signed his own death warrant. Ceaușescu and his wife, Elena, fled the capital of Bucharest, but they were later captured and executed by firing squad on live television on Christmas Day. More than 1,100 people died during the ensuing Romanian Revolution.

RIGHT Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev addresses the United Nations in December 1988 to announce a new era of superpower co-operation

Looting the Motherland

WITH THE FALL OF THE USSR, NEW PRESIDENT BORIS YELTSIN TRIED TO OPEN A STAGNANT ECONOMY UP TO MARKET FORCES. HE GOT MUCH MORE THAN HE BARGAINED FOR…

Written by April Madden

Nobody wanted the West's pity. Easy for the decadent capitalists, in their warm, comfortable homes, eating their hamburgers and pizzas and colourful American cereal, gawping at the international news on their lavish, shining TV networks, to feel sorry for poor Mother Russia. Moscow didn't need their sympathy. And it certainly didn't need the West's patronising, self-congratulatory charity. They could take their Live Aid and their UNICEF and their Comic Relief, and they could shove it. It was up to Russians to fix Russian problems, and fix them they would.

In the late 1980s the West was in the heady throes of booming financial growth, and the yanking back of the Iron Curtain was revealing it to ordinary Russians. Cars, fast food, consumer electronics, fashion, toys, and brands, brands, brands: the West had it all, and now the Soviet people wanted it too. And their new president knew that unless he made strides to get it for them then he'd have another bloody revolution on his hands.

The Russians' experience of the fall of the Iron Curtain was very different to that of other nations in the communist bloc. Notably, East Germany toppled the Berlin Wall to reveal not the shabby, isolated West Berlin still reeling from the reparations of World War II that it expected but a lively international metropolis, its postwar homes and businesses rebuilt stronger with the aid of international partners, its well-heeled people welcoming long-lost friends and family with open arms holding the kind of food and gifts East Berliners could only have dreamt of.

By contrast, the perestroika reforms of the USSR's Gorbachev government, intended to shore up the socialist regime in the grip of economic stagnation, had only added to the Soviet Union's woes. The Gorbachev regime had allowed free enterprise and the private ownership of businesses for the first time since the installation of Lenin's revolutionary government while at the same time handing the controls of state-owned businesses to workers' collectives. Surplus product could now be sold for profit rather than stockpiled. But the Law on State Enterprise and the Law on Cooperatives didn't go far enough. They

ОБМЕН
ВАЛЮТЫ
EXCHANGE

LEFT The nomenklatura had special passes allowing them exclusive access to Moscow's GUM department store on Saturday mornings. This woman is being refused entry by a guard

ABOVE Boris Yeltsin makes a speech atop a tank in Moscow exhorting citizens of the USSR to reject hard-line communism

OPPOSITE In 1994, it was better value to exchange rubles for U.S. dollars to spend at grey and black markets in the struggling CIS economy

trod a muddy and shambling line between socialism and capitalism, and for many ordinary Russians they managed to provide the worst of both worlds with none of the benefits of either. Food shortages were no longer to be alleviated by the state, nor would (or could) it prop up ailing industries. The workers' collectives that had stepped in to take over meant well but were inexperienced. Nobody outside the upper echelons of the machine of state had run a business for over 60 years, and anyway, their hands were tied by the fact that Gorbachev's reforms, intended to stave off a crisis of socialism rather than stand toe to toe with capitalist Europe, didn't go far enough to create a functioning national market. There were cucumbers on the shelves for the first time in years, but nobody had any bread to eat them with.

Minister Boris Yeltsin, always a firebrand, had resigned from the politburo in 1987 in protest, saying that the perestroika reforms didn't go far enough and would cause an economic disaster. He turned his back on communism and began to call for the Soviet Union to transition to multi-party democracy. In 1991, the tired, hungry, disaffected people of the Soviet Union elected him president in the hope that he had an answer to their problems. He did, but it was a hard one. In October 1991, he announced that the Soviet economy would be undergoing "shock therapy". He would be transitioning the economy from a stagnant socialist one to that of a free market. Poland had done so two years before, and it had worked for them.

Poland, however, despite its enforced postwar flirtation with communism, was traditionally viewed as an ally by the world's then economic powerhouse, the United States. It benefitted from their financial and advisory aid, as well as that of the International Monetary Fund. The Soviet Union, though – the 'evil empire'

"The West had it all, and now the Soviet people wanted it too"

that Cold War America had set itself against – did not. Maybe it really had seen the light of capitalist democracy, or maybe that was just yet another Russian psyops ruse. Whatever the case, no U.S. aid – or trade – would be forthcoming for Moscow. When Yeltsin ordered communist price controls on goods to be lifted, his radical policy, combined with the Russian central banks' inexperienced handling of the transition to a free market economy, caused inflation to skyrocket. Western society was appalled by media images of Russians standing in bread lines with wheelbarrows full of worthless rubles, and American President George H. W. Bush eventually made diplomatic overtures to the belaboured Yeltsin government during the Christmas of 1991. The Soviet Union had just been dissolved, and in its wake had risen the CIS, or Commonwealth of Independent States.

A few weeks before the dissolution of the Soviet Union a new minister had joined the Yeltsin cabinet. Anatoly Chubais was an economic reformist and an associate professor at the Leningrad Institute of Engineering and Economic Sciences in St. Petersburg. The head of Rosimushchestvo, the Federal Agency for State Property Management, Chubais was a proponent of privatisation and argued that the rapid transfer of state industries to non-governmental entities had worked well for Hungary on its journey to becoming a Western economy. The Congress of People's Deputies, however, gun-shy after perestroika and hyperinflation, disagreed; they favoured the ideas of economist Vitaly Nayshul instead. Nayshul believed that voucher privatisation was the way to go: instead of the new privately owned companies trading on a stock exchange, citizens were issued with books of vouchers that entitled them to shares in formerly state-owned industries.

This more socialist-sounding method seemed preferable to the Congress of People's Deputies and had enjoyed moderate success in the former Czechoslovakia after the Velvet Revolution of 1989. The Congress also thought this method would prevent Bratva – the Russian mafia – and the nomenklatura, the former executive management class of the USSR, from becoming overly wealthy and powerful in the new economy. Bratva had organisational power and access to ready black market cash, while the nomenklatura were dangerously close to (sometimes even drawn from) the old tsarist elite. They were urbane, devious, more experienced in business and had an active interest in maintaining the status quo.

Chubais was put in the unfortunate position of spearheading and advocating for a policy he had initially opposed. Nonetheless, the Russian people embraced it, with around 98

RIGHT Boris Yeltsin announces his resignation in 1991. His successor, Vladimir Putin (left), would vow to destroy the oligarch class if elected, but in practice he enabled their criminality

ABOVE An elderly Russian couple in 1991. Hyperinflation made their 200-ruble monthly pension worth the equivalent of just ten U.S. dollars

OPPOSITE TOP Soviet citizens celebrate the start of the perestroika reforms in 1987. Sadly, these much- needed reforms would not go far enough to save the economy

OPPOSITE BOTTOM Russians spent hours queuing to purchase basic foods in state-owned shops like this Moscow fishmonger, 1991

ДАЕШЬ ПЕРЕСТРОЙКУ!

per cent of adults participating in the scheme. But they didn't stay in it for long. The rigours of life in a free market economy were new and unexpected, and very soon shadier, wealthier members of society were approaching cash-strapped Russians with attractive offers to buy their shares vouchers.

Election cycles were a new concept in the former USSR, and as the next one rolled around in the mid-'90s, Yeltsin realised that not only did he need to woo a populace who had been promised circuses along with their bread and so far got neither, but he also needed money to fund an election campaign. Loans For Shares was like an official version of the rich buying shares vouchers from the poor, only on a macroeconomic scale. Proposed by banker Vladimir Potanin (who made out like a bandit on the back of the scheme and is now a billionaire), it allowed banks and businessmen to loan money to the Yeltsin government in exchange for shares in newly privatised Russian companies. It was open internationally, with the hope that this would encourage Western investors to bring their wealth of experience to Russian boardrooms, restructuring former Soviet industries by cutting through leftover communist bureaucracy and creating modern, agile businesses ready for international commerce. While the World Bank and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) made some small, careful, politically motivated loans that won them a small stake in Siberian oil firm Sibneft Oil (now Gazprom Neft), the bulk of Loans For Shares purchases were made by a rising class of newly powerful Russian businessmen: the so-called oligarchs. These financially savvy nouveau riche had already benefitted from running businesses and buying up shares vouchers, but now there were bigger fish for them to land.

A key term of the scheme was that the oligarchs would not be able to bid for the shares they wanted until after the election, ensuring that Yeltsin's government got their cash and remained in power. But if Yeltsin thought that they would continue to prop up his presidency afterwards, he was wrong. Increasingly erratic and prone to drunkenness, he was becoming a loose cannon, and the ever-increasing media coverage his private enterprise partners deliberately bought for him revealed this to the watching public in Russia and beyond, allowing voluble, drunken Yeltsin to become a joke on TV shows and in newspapers worldwide, toppling his presidency from within. Yeltsin's promotion of Western democracy and capitalism didn't suit a class who, it was whispered, had taken advantage of the economic chaos of perestroika and the early Yeltsin government to help themselves to state assets that maybe hadn't been on the table at all. They had gotten rich very, very quickly indeed. The Loans For Shares auctions, it was alleged, had been rigged.

For a newer breed of oligarch, one who wasn't a Yeltsinite visionary or who hadn't come from the pragmatic, wait-and-see architecture of the nomenklatura, Yeltsin had to go before he opened the Pandora's box of Western democratic transparency on the murky privatisation of the Motherland's assets and exposed those who had their hands in the till. Instead, they needed someone strict, motivated, a strongman unlike the shambolic Yeltsin, one who would combine the authoritarianism that would keep them – and him – in power with a keen financial sense of acquisition that would continue to allow certain oligarchs free rein over Russian business. They chose as their man a member of Yeltsin's cabinet, a former KGB officer who had spent his political career managing the security services before rising to the dizzy heights of prime minister. When Yeltsin was forced to resign in 1999, he stepped in as acting president before being officially elected four months later. He hasn't been out of power since. His name is Vladimir Putin.

МЯСО
СУБПРОДУКТЫ
ПТИЦА

Images: Alamy, Getty Images

10 remarkable Russians

MEET THE INGENIOUS RUSSIANS WHOSE DISCOVERIES AND CREATIVITY LEFT A LASTING IMPACT ON THEIR COUNTRY AND BEYOND

Written by Scott Reeves

As a country that spans 17.1 million square kilometres (6.6 million square miles) and boasts a population of over 143 million, there have been plenty of people who've lived under the flag of Russia over the centuries – and it's not much of a surprise that some of them have done some extraordinary things. Some pushed the boundaries of scientific understanding. Others displayed their creative talents in ways that the world had never seen before. Many had clearly defined opinions on the Russian autocracy, and they had an influence that inspired generations. Although it's an almost impossible job, we've picked a top ten of Russia's most remarkable minds from the past few centuries. From medieval icon painters to movie icons on the big screen, let's meet the Russian thinkers who shaped the country as it is today.

I

Maya Plisetskaya

Dancing saved Maya Plisetskaya's life. She was raised in a staunchly communist family, but that didn't stop her father being arrested and executed during Stalin's purge of 1937. Her mother and younger brother were arrested too and sent to the gulags, but Maya was allowed to keep training at the prestigious Bolshoi ballet school that she'd attended for the previous three years. After graduating in 1943, she gained a job in the company repertoire and took on many leading roles. But the whiff of suspicion followed her for years. The KGB labelled her as 'politically immature', she was excluded from touring abroad and protests were held when she won an honorary title in 1958.

Maya had too much talent to keep her in the wings for long, however. She was remarkably flexible and easily recognisable on stage for her long legs and red hair – looks that she claimed to have inherited from her father. She used them to full effect in many principal roles including the dual heroine of *Swan Lake* or the title role of *Carmen Suite*, a part designed specifically for her. She continued to dance well after her contemporaries had retired and could even stand on pointe well into her 60s.

Plisetskaya graces the stage at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow, 1980

Getty Images; Alamy

"She was the first woman to earn a doctorate in mathematics"

2

Sofya Kovalevskaya

Sofya Kovalevskaya was a trailblazer in the academic world. She was the first woman to earn a doctorate in mathematics, the first woman appointed to a full professorship in northern Europe, and one of the first women to work for a scientific journal as an editor. However, 19th-century Russia wasn't as liberal as the monarchies of Europe, and Kovalevskaya was forced to pursue her passion for numbers abroad. After showing an early talent for maths, Kovalevskaya married palaeontology student Vladimir Kovalevsky at the age of 18. It was a partnership of convenience that allowed Kovalevskaya to accompany Vladimir to Germany. There she studied under the best mathematicians of the day. In 1874, Kovalevskaya earned a doctorate in mathematics from the University of Göttingen. Her work saw her break new ground in the understanding of Saturn's rings and elliptical functions, but her most significant work was on partial differential equations. In 1889, six years after Vladimir's death by suicide, Kovalevskaya became a full professor at Stockholm University. Aside from being a pioneer for women in academia, she was also a political radical who travelled to Paris in support of a short-lived revolution in 1871.

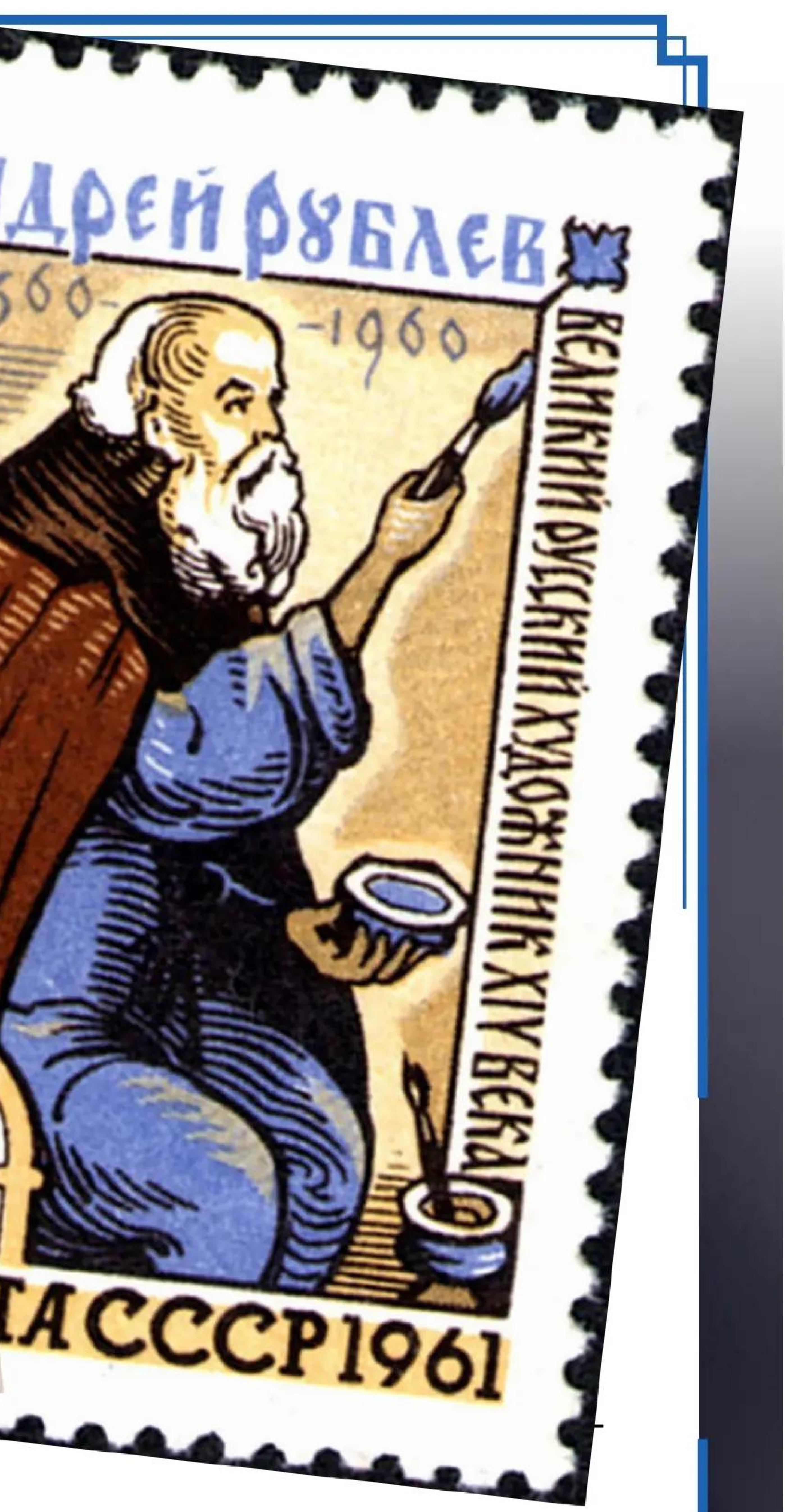
Kovalevskaya was a pioneer for women in mathematics

3

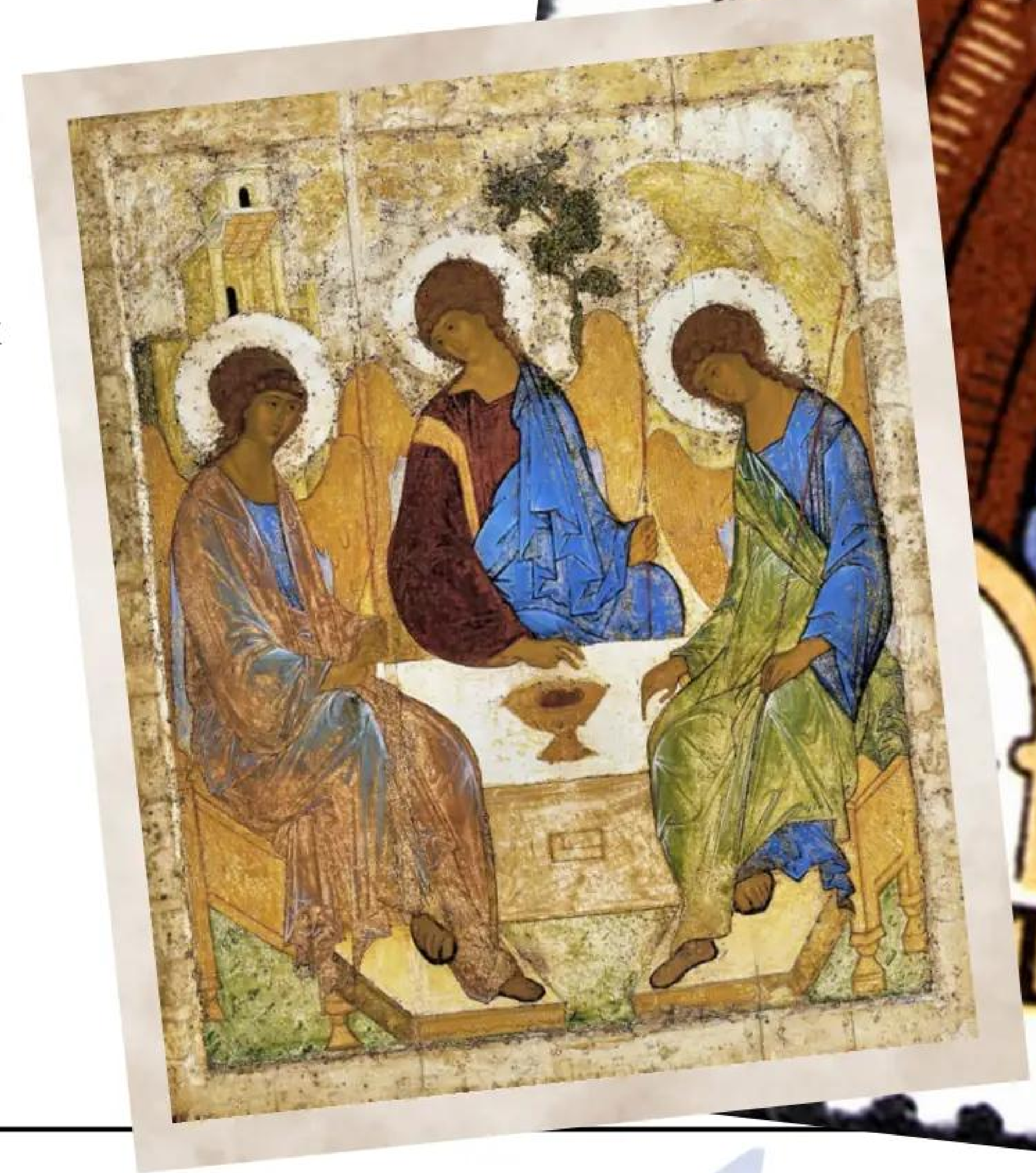
Andrei Rublev

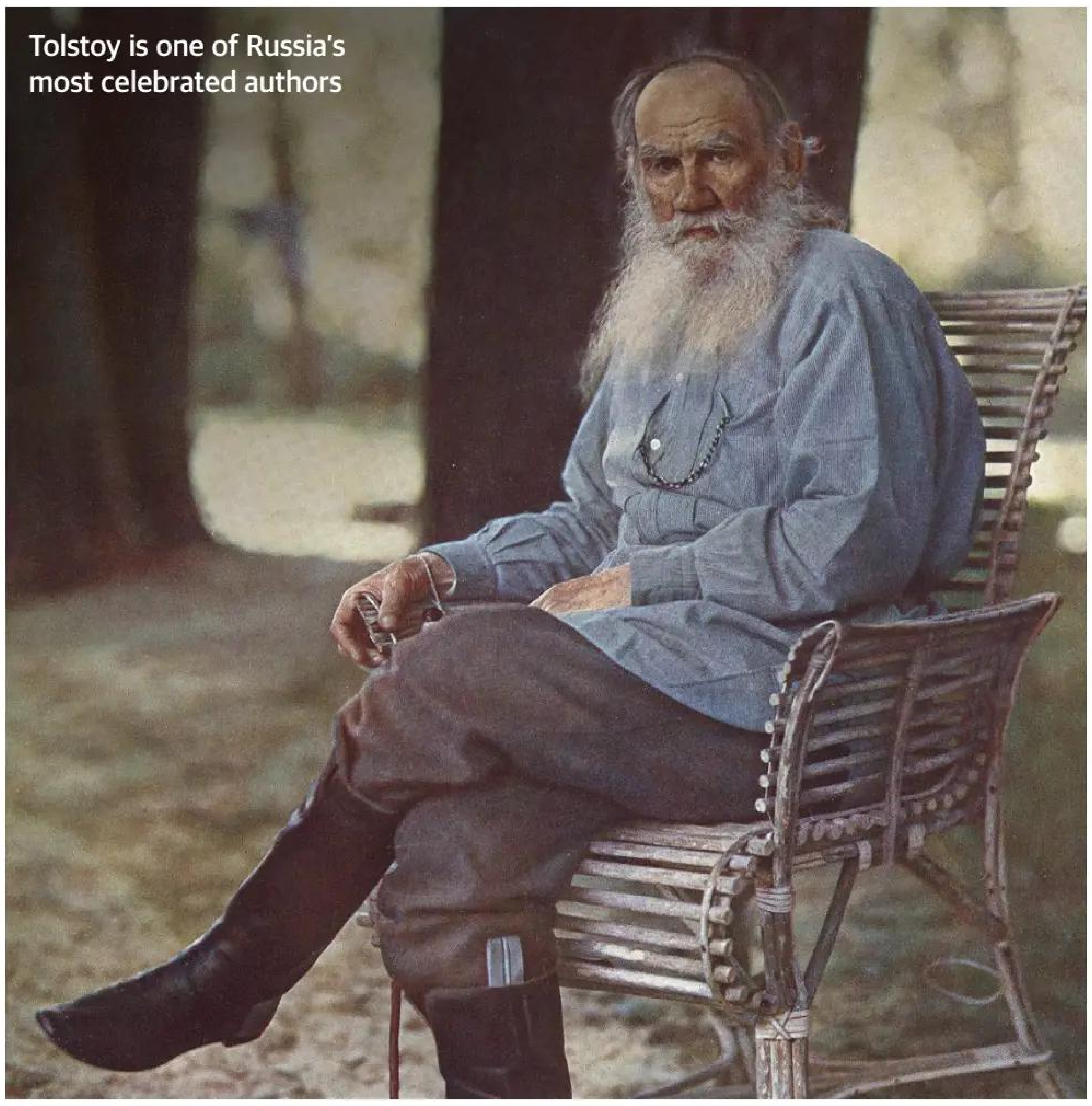
Andrei Rublev's origins are shrouded in mystery. Eastern Orthodox tradition states that he was brought up in a monastery, but the first known reference to his life only occurred around the age of 40, when Rublev was named as the junior of three masters who painted the icons and frescos in the Cathedral of the Annunciation in the Kremlin. Rublev likely learned his craft under another of those masters, Theophanes the Greek, but he soon moved out from under Theophanes' shadow and moulded a reputation as one of the greatest artists of Orthodox Christianity. Rublev painted Dormition Cathedral in Vladimir and Andronikov Monastery in Moscow, but his best-known work is *The Trinity*, an icon showing three angels visiting Abraham at the Oak of Mamre. He was commissioned to create it for Trinity Cathedral in Sergiyev Posad, and the icon he painted is the perfect example of Rublev's signature style. The characters are calm, the colours are restrained. In time, Rublev's painting would be seen as the epitome of Eastern Orthodox iconography, and he'd influence artists long after his death around 1430. Rublev was canonized as a saint by the Russian Orthodox Church in 1988, and he remains one of the country's best-known artists.

RIGHT A stamp commemorating the 600th anniversary of Rublev's birth



BELOW *The Trinity*, Andrei Rublev's best-known work, was recently returned to its original home at Trinity Cathedral





Tolstoy is one of Russia's most celebrated authors

4

Leo Tolstoy

Born into an aristocratic family, Leo Tolstoy had a privileged upbringing, but his world view began to change after he served in the Crimean War. Though he was decorated for bravery, Tolstoy was also appalled by the number of deaths at the Siege of Sevastopol. He turned to writing after being demobilised and wrote about what he knew best at that time of his life: warfare and Russian society. Tolstoy's 1869 epic *War and Peace*, set during Napoleon's invasion of Russia, explores the impact of war on a wide range of characters, both real and fictional. Eight years later, he finished *Anna Karenina*. That novel delves into the lives of Russia's aristocracy, exploring their relationships and betrayals.

While writing *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy underwent a spiritual awakening. He became an ardent pacifist, and nonviolent protest became a feature of his later writings. Some of his interpretations of the Bible brought him into conflict with the Russian Orthodox Church, and some of his pacifist positions clashed with the government, but many applauded his stance. Tolstoy was nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature five times and the Nobel Peace Prize three times. Though he never won, his writings influenced future Peace Prize winners Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.

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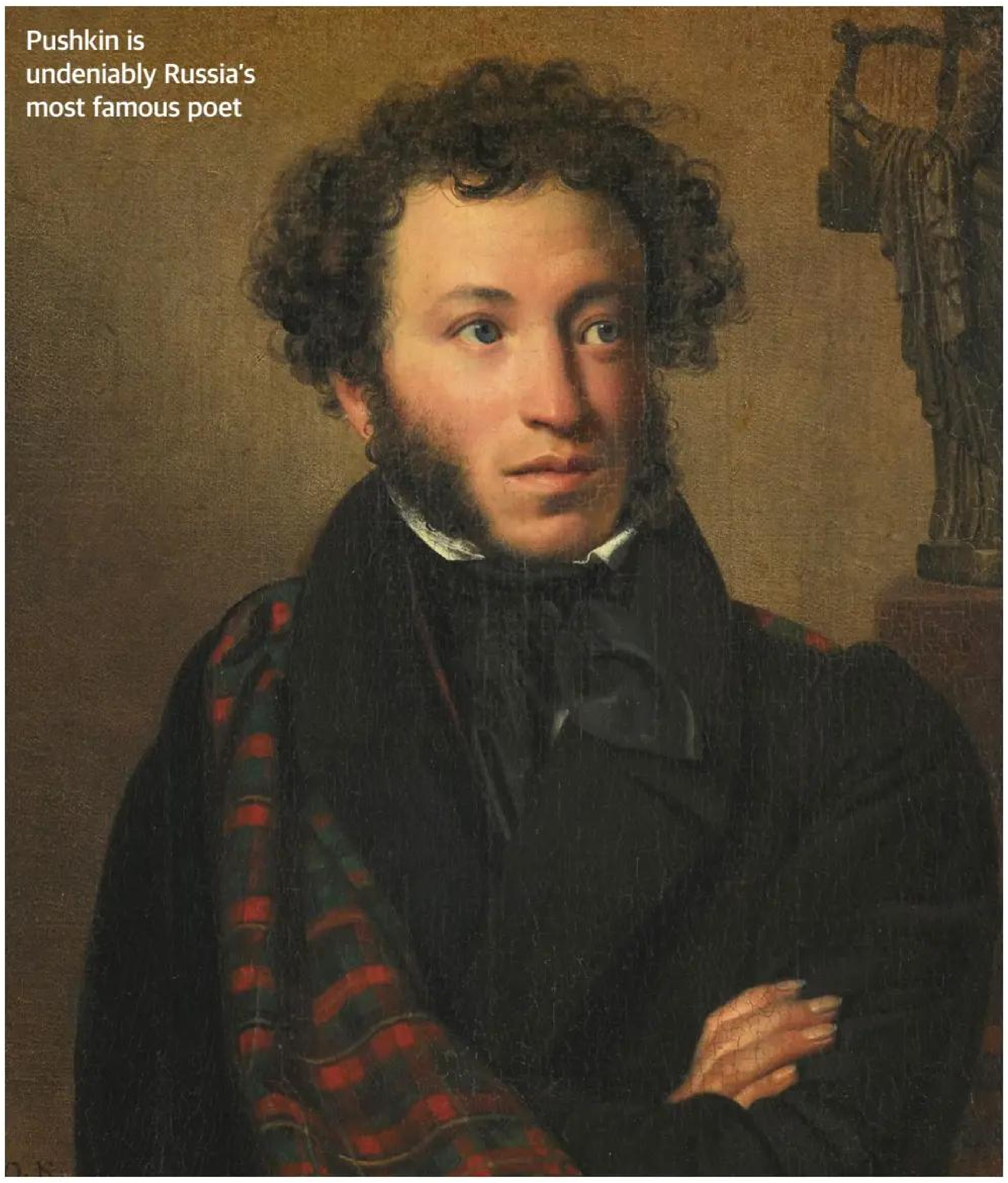


Pushkin is undeniably Russia's most famous poet

5

Alexander Pushkin

As the father of modern Russian literature, Alexander Pushkin played a similar role for Russian writing that William Shakespeare did in English. Pushkin shaped the Russian language, adopting vernacular in his plays, poetry and prose, and he spanned a range of topics, emotions and themes in his writing. He's perhaps best known for *Eugene Onegin*, a verse novel that blends sharp social commentary with themes of love, change, and existential contemplation, but he also wrote historical dramas, short stories and fairy tales.

Pushkin was a magnet for controversy. Upon graduating from the inaugural class from the Imperial Lyceum, Pushkin chose to read 'Ode to Liberty', his poem that was critical of the tsars' despotic powers. That led to his temporary exile from Russia, and although he was later allowed to return, Pushkin remained under suspicion when revolutionaries from the 1825 Decembrist Revolt were found to have his writing in their possession. In 1837, amid rumours that his wife was having an affair, Pushkin challenged her supposed lover to a duel. But while Pushkin was a poet, the other man was a military officer. Pushkin was shot in the abdomen and died two days later, robbing Russia of one of its finest literary geniuses.

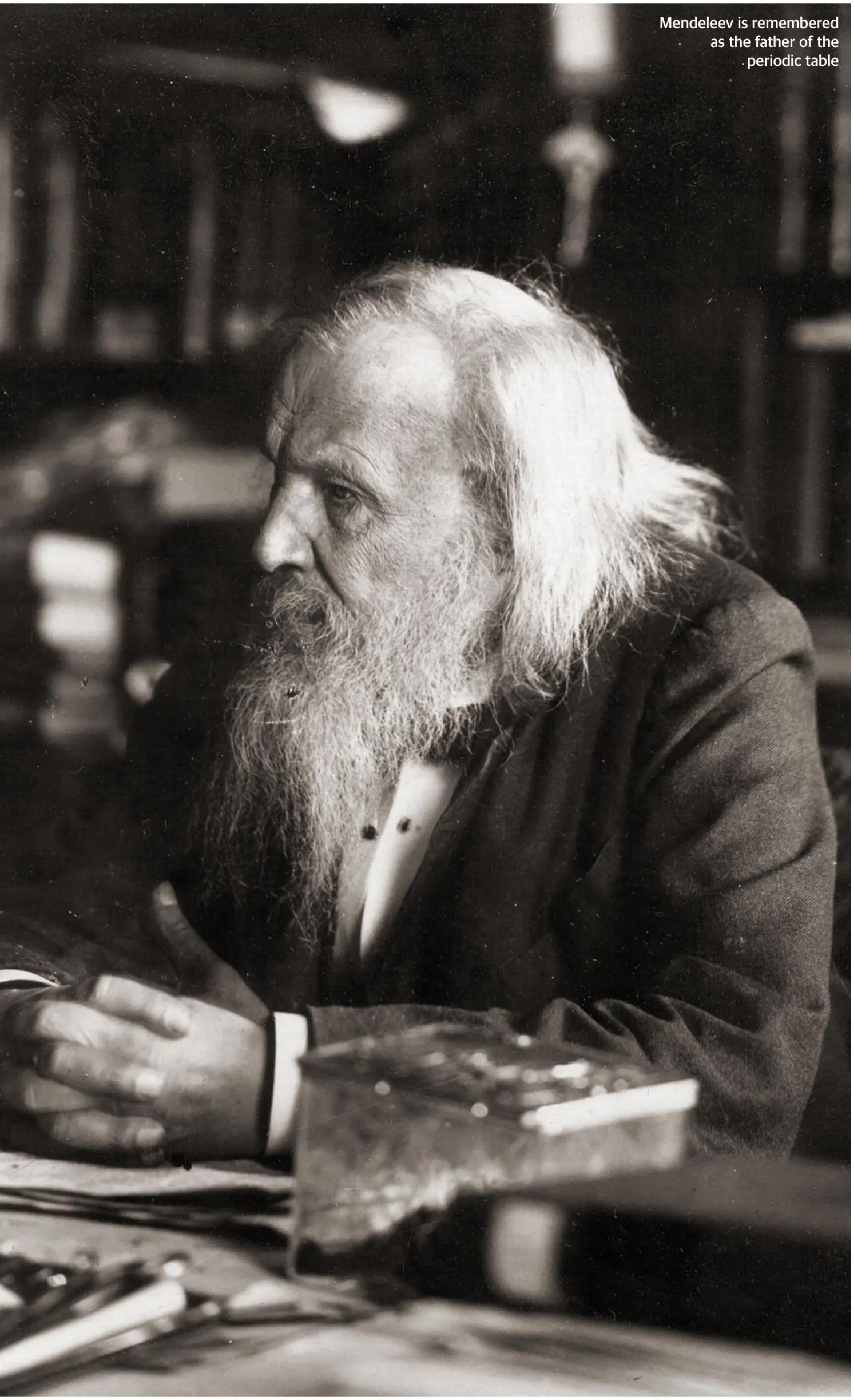
Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

6

The St. Petersburg Conservatory opened just in time for Tchaikovsky to become one of its first graduates in 1865. Prior to then, music was regarded as little more than a hobby in Russia, and Tchaikovsky initially expected to spend his life working in the civil service. However, his tutors at the Conservatory taught Western-style composition, which Tchaikovsky merged with traditional Russian music. At the time, Tchaikovsky was criticised by some for falling between two stools. Russians felt that his music was too Westernised, while European critics disliked his Russian influences. However, others lauded Tchaikovsky for his new sound.

Tchaikovsky was a tormented genius. He attempted suicide after his short marriage broke down, and he sank into depression after his nephew (and possibly lover) died. Despite the travails of his personal life, he benefited from the patronage of wealthy widow Nadezhda von Meck, whose financial supported gave Tchaikovsky the time and freedom to compose his most famous works. The result was a catalogue of music that included ballets *Swan Lake*, *Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker*. Tchaikovsky also worked on concert pieces like the *1812 Overture*, a piece of music famed for its climactic volley combining cannon fire with a brass fanfare that remains one of his most popular works.

Tchaikovsky's music is recognised all over the world



Mendeleev is remembered as the father of the periodic table

Dmitri Mendeleev

Dmitri Mendeleev had a tough start in life. Born in Siberia, his family was plunged into poverty thanks to his father's alcoholism and early death, and his mother lost her job when the glass factory she worked in burned down. Only at the Main Pedagogical Institute in St Petersburg did things begin to turn around. Here Mendeleev discovered a talent and passion for chemistry. His breakthrough moment came in 1869, at the age of 35, when Mendeleev unveiled a new way of ordering the chemical elements.

Mendeleev was studying chemical ways to improve cheese-making when he began writing the names and properties of each element on a series of cards. He laid them out in columns and rows in order of increasing atomic weight while keeping elements of similar properties together. The result was the periodic table. Mendeleev's system was a work in progress. He continued to refine it during his life, predicting the existence and properties of the as-yet-undiscovered elements gallium, scandium, and germanium, leaving a place for them in his chart. He also embraced the idea that his periodic table wasn't perfect and offered it as a foundation for future generations to build upon.

7

"Mendeleev discovered a talent and passion for chemistry"

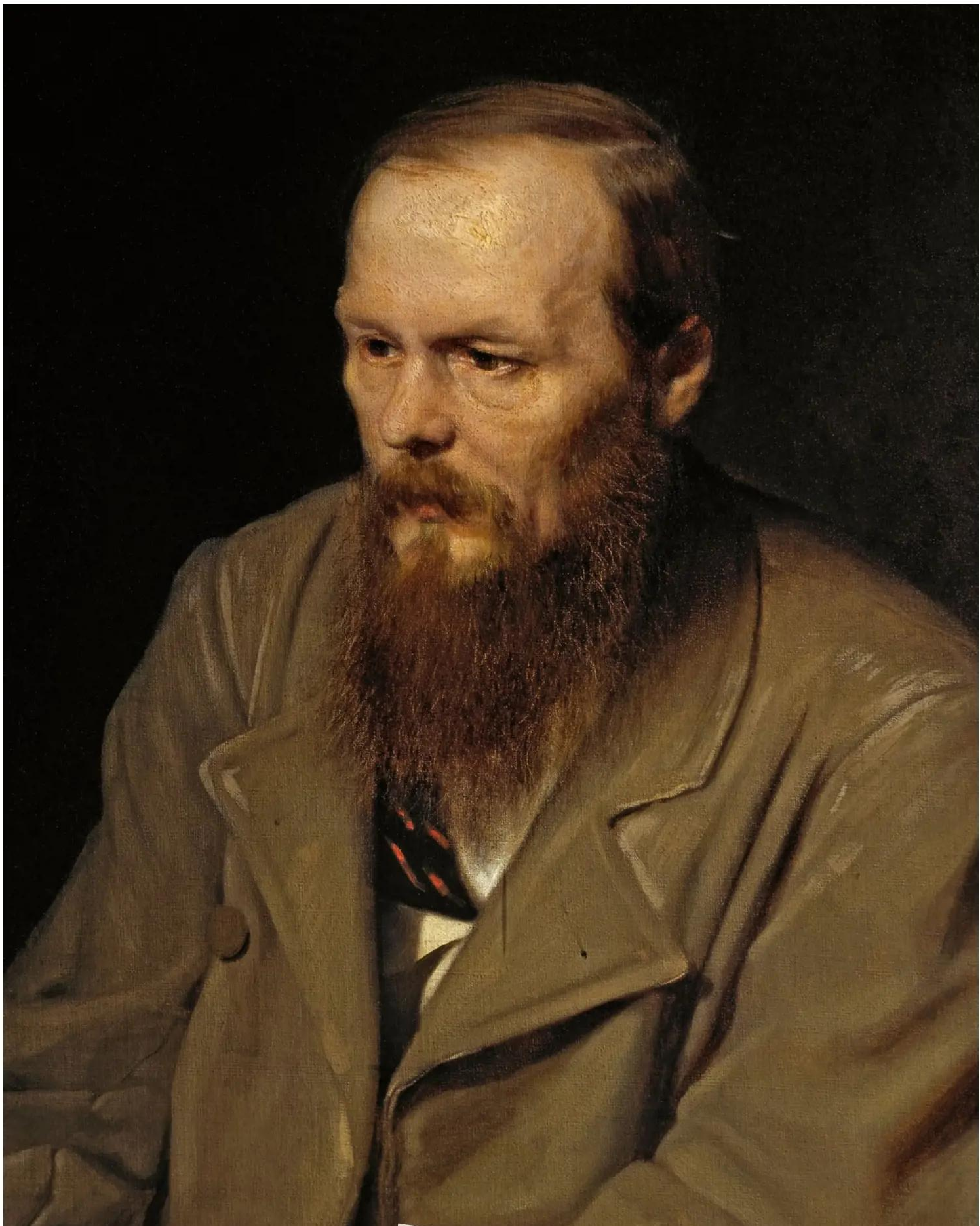
Images: Getty Images, Alamy

8

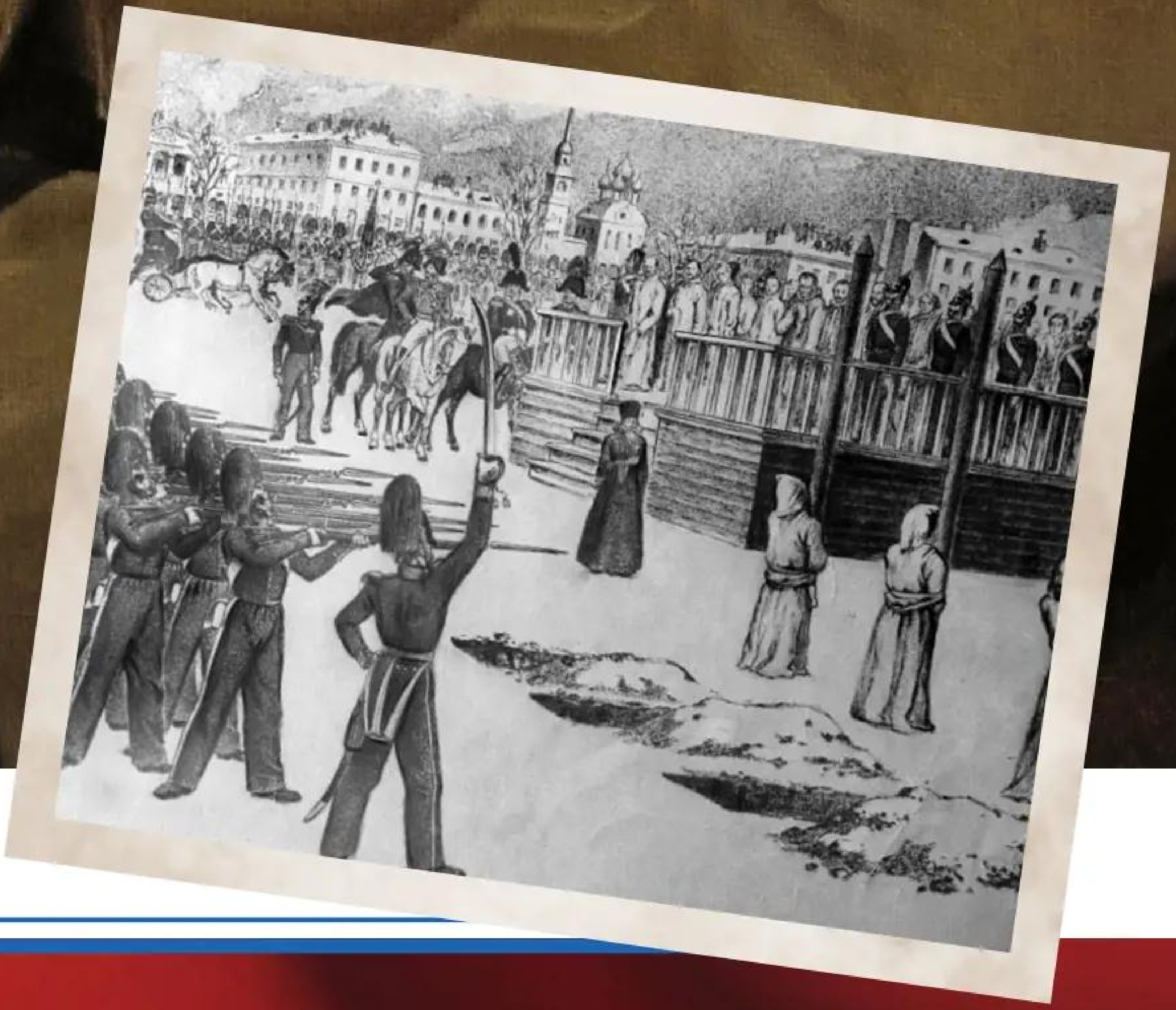
Fyodor Dostoevsky

Fyodor Dostoevsky was already a published author with two novels and several short stories under his belt when he joined the Petrashevsky Circle, a socialist society comprising intellectuals who met to discuss reforming Russia's archaic government. Three years later, the group caught the attention of the authorities, and Dostoevsky was among several members who were arrested, charged with being a revolutionary, and sentenced to death. He underwent the stressful experience of a mock execution before being told that his sentence had been commuted to four years of hard labour in Siberia followed by six years of military service. During his prison term Dostoevsky was classed as a dangerous criminal and his hands and ankles were shackled at all times until his release.

The tsar hoped that the prisoners would thank him for his benevolence. Instead, Dostoevsky's imprisonment only increased his bitterness towards the tsarist regime — and it also had an impact on his craft. Beginning in 1866, Dostoevsky wrote four great novels: *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, *Demons* and *The Brothers Karamazov*. Each one covered dark and complex themes. His take on morality influenced not only subsequent generations of writers but also philosophers, including Existentialists and Freudians.



ABOVE A portrait of Dostoevsky by Vasily Perov, c. 1872



RIGHT The mock execution and imprisonment of Fyodor Dostoevsky had a profound effect on his later writing

9

Pyotr Stolypin

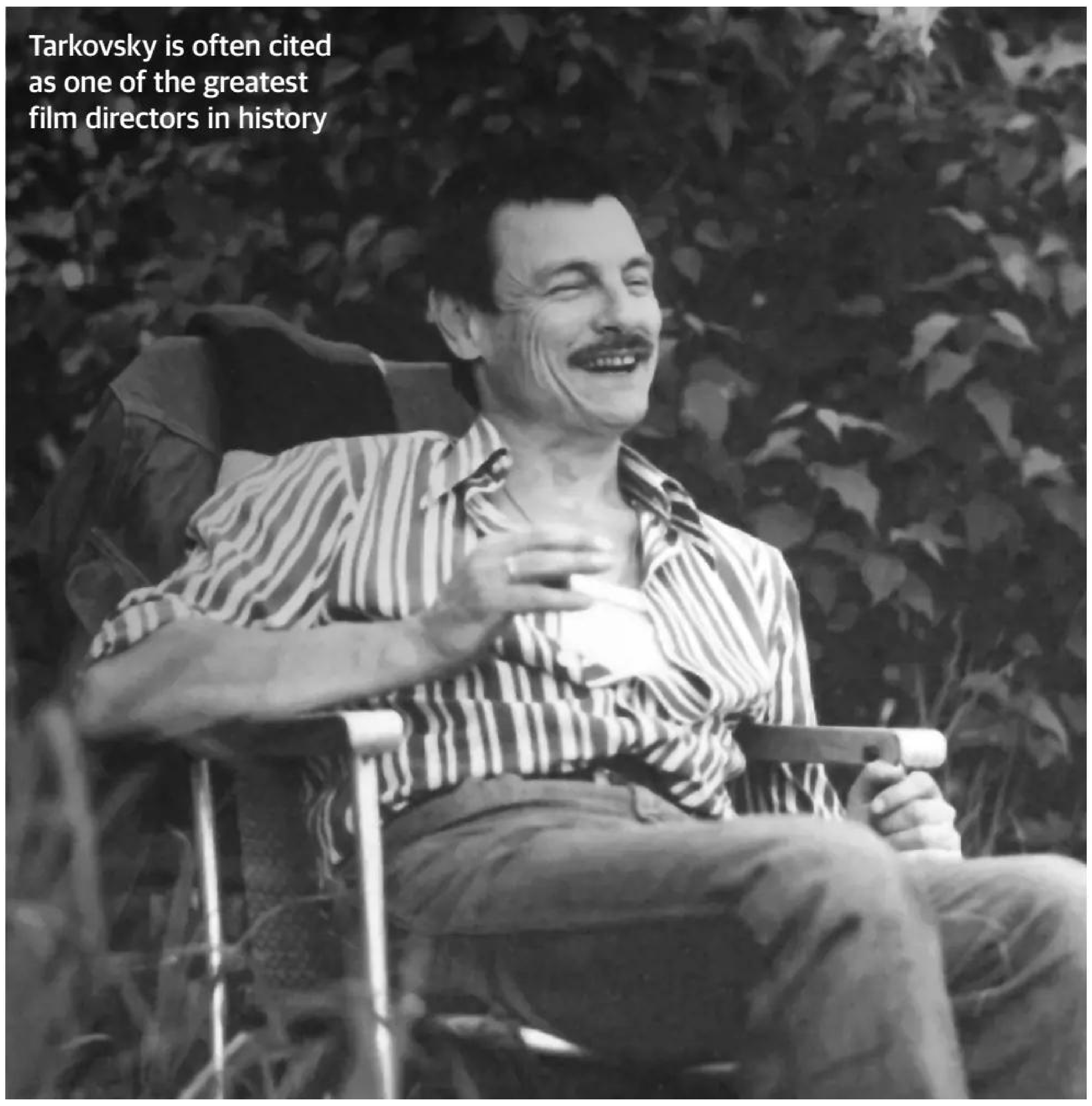
The Imperial Russian regime was autocratic, with power centralised and held by the tsar, but most emperors were unable or unwilling to carry out the business of government themselves. Instead, they relied on ministers to do the work for them – and few had a greater impact than Tsar Nicholas' trusted statesman, Pyotr Stolypin.

Stolypin ran the Russian Government between 1906 and 1911, a crucial period when tsarist authority was beginning to crumble. He aimed to prop up the old regime through a programme of much-needed modernisation and reform. He allowed peasants to break free of archaic landholding structures and own land themselves. Stolypin's hope was that private ownership of land would stimulate greater productivity and kick-start the Russian economy. But Stolypin was also willing to use the stick as well as the carrot. He was ruthless in cracking down on political dissent, and so many opponents were put to death by hanging that the military tribunals that ordered their execution were known as 'Stolypin's neckties'.

Hailed as the greatest reformer in Russian history, he was killed in 1911, meaning he didn't live to see the collapse of the regime he did so much to try and save.

RIGHT Stolypin attempted to strengthen the tsarist regime, but ultimately he failed

BELOW Pyotr Stolypin had already survived ten attempts on his life, including this bomb attack, before he was shot dead at the theatre by a leftist revolutionary



Tarkovsky is often cited as one of the greatest film directors in history

10

Andrei Tarkovsky

Andrei Tarkovsky made a name as the greatest Soviet film director with five magnificent movies shot over 17 years in the USSR. *Ivan's Childhood* and *Solaris* were well received by audiences and critics alike, although his 1966 biopic of iconographer Andrei Rublev saw him fall foul of Soviet censors who wanted the subject portrayed in a more favourable light. Tarkovski's 1975 film, *Mirror*, was based on his own life, but it was released with little fanfare and initially polarised critics and audiences thanks to its non-linear narrative and poetic approach. However, *Mirror* has since been reappraised and judged to be one of the Soviet era's best films.

After shooting *Stalker* in 1976, Tarkovski fell out with Soviet censors again. This time he decided to get out of the USSR, and he shot his final two films abroad. *Nostalghia* was filmed in Italy and won a special prize at the Cannes Film Festival despite the Soviet authorities doing their best to lobby against it. *The Sacrifice* was filmed in Sweden while Tarkovsky's health was beginning to fail. He was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer and died in 1986, one of several crew members who'd developed illnesses after being exposed to toxic chemicals while filming *Stalker*.

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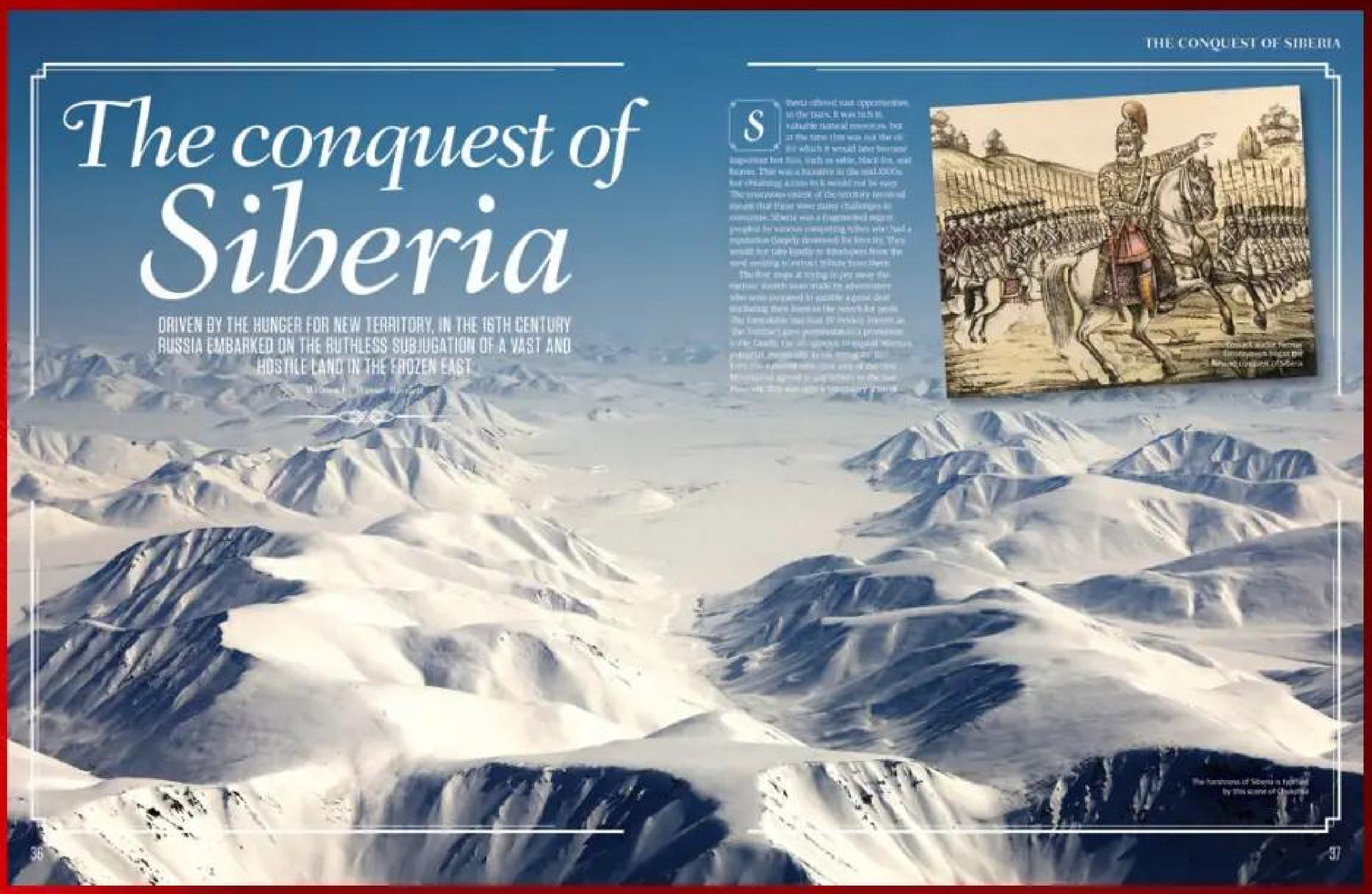

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